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AGAINST SOCIAL DE(CON)STRUCTION OF SCIENCE: CAUTIONARY TALES FROM THE THIRD WORLD

MEERA NANDA

ISTVÁN MÉSZÁROS' *BEYOND CAPITAL*

JOEL KOVEL

CUBA TODAY AND THE FUTURE OF CUBAN SOCIALISM

AL CAMPBELL

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Nelson Lichtenstein and Martin Glaberman: an exchange

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

In its 48-year history, *Monthly Review* has had three editors: the founders Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, and, after Leo's death in 1968, Harry Magdoff who had been an editor in all but name for several years before Leo's death.

This arrangement has worked well, but it has one obvious flaw. Both of us are by now beyond the age usually considered that of retirement. The problem is not that either of us is considering retirement, only that the decision may not be ours to make. For quite some time now, friends and supporters of *MR* have been asking us what to expect in case one or both of us can no longer carry on. We have had to tell them that we were fully aware of the problem and hoped soon to have an answer. Now at last we do have an answer, and we think it is a good one.

(Continued on inside back cover)

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AGAINST SOCIAL DE(CON)STRUCTION OF SCIENCE: CAUTIONARY TALES FROM THE THIRD WORLD

by MEERA NANDA

People resisting despotism and its lies need ideals of one truth, one reason, one reality and on occasion, one science. To be able to be critical of the unities is a luxury and let us never forget it.

—Ian Hacking, 1996

I.

One of the most remarkable—and the least remarked upon–features of the "radical" movement engaged in deconstructing natural science is how it ends up denying the unity (i.e., universality) of truth, reason, reality, and science precisely in the name of those who need these unities most urgently—the "people resisting despotism and its lies." This includes those of us from non-Western societies fighting against the despotism of some of our own cultural traditions, and the untested and untestable cosmologies that are used to justify these traditions. A loose and varied assortment of theories that bear the label of social constructivism have declared the very content of modern natural science to be justified, in the final instance, by "Western" cultural values and social interests. Once modern science is seen not as a

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universally valid knowledge about the natural world, but as a particular or "ethno"-construct of Western society, it becomes easy to see science as a part of the imperialistic West's despotism, which the west's "Others" must resist in the name of cultural survival and anti-imperialism. Modern science thus becomes a despotism, an object of resistance rather than an ally of those resisting despotism.

My goal in this paper is to cast a critical look at these anti-realist and relativist views of "Western" science, which have gained wide currency in the postmodern academy; and I want to look at them from the perspective of the people's science movements in non-Western countries. These theories—unlike the Marxian idea of social mediation of knowledge with which they are often confused—have eroded the distinction between scientifically justified beliefs and folk beliefs and/or ideology. What has undermined these distinctions is the fundamental thesis of social constructivism which states that all beliefs alike are justified by the community consensus, which is itself based upon social power, rhetoric and custom. There is no objective truth about the real world which scientifically justified knowledge can aim toward, but rather all "truth" about "reality" is literally constructed out of choices between equally justifiable interpretations that a "thought collective" makes. These choices, in turn, are driven by the conscious and unconscious biases and interests of the members of any community of inquirers. Though varied in emphases and details, constructivist theorists agree that there simply is no truth, or even reality, that can transcend the local social context of inquiry. The "unities" of truth and reason that Ian Hacking speaks for (above), are treated in the constructivist discourse as remnants of the imperialistic impulse of the Enlightenment which sought to impose the West's own peculiar stories about truth and reality on the rest of the world.

Such a view of knowledge justifies itself in the name of cultural autonomy, tolerance, and respect for non-Western ways of knowing the world and living in it. But I will argue that, in actual practice, such "tolerance" has only ended up providing theoretical grounds for, and a progressive gloss on, the fast growing anti-modernist, nativist and cultural/religious

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revivalist movements in many parts of what used to be called the Third World. These movements seek to subordinate scientific rationality to local traditions, and thus are incapable of critically interrogating these same traditions, many of which are patently illiberal and oppressive to women and other marginalized groups in non-Western societies.

Almost in direct proportion to the rise of nativist antimodernist social movements, which correspond with ascendance of social constructivist theories in the academy globally, many parts of the Third World have seen a decline and stigmatization of people's science movements. These people's science movements seek to appropriate the contents and methods of modern science in order to bring traditional knowledge under empirical scrutiny and critique. In the part of the Third World that I am most familiar with—my native India—people's science movements have come to be eclipsed by the highly visible and vocal transnational alliance that has emerged around the idea that modern science is Western, and that the non-West needs its non-Western "ethno"-sciences. Affirmed and emboldened by the most avant-garde intellectuals in the West and at home, these nativist movements tend to label any critique of traditional knowledge from the vantage point of modern science as a sign of Western imperialism, or worse, a hangover from the old, "discredited" and "Western" Enlightenment (although, interestingly, they continue to applaud the critique of "Western" science from the perspective of ethnosciences as anti-Eurocentric, and therefore progressive).[1] Indeed, I believe that the recent electoral success of the religious right (the BJP) in India has definitely benefited from the cultural climate in which even the supposedly Left-inclined intellectuals and activists tend to treat all liberal and modern ideas as "Western," inauthentic, and thus inappropriate for India. Thus I will try to show that although the animus against the rationality of modern science is purportedly justified in the name of anti-imperialism and egalitarianism, its real beneficiaries are not the people but the nativists and nationalists of all stripes, religious or "merely" cultural/civilizational.

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Perched rather comfortably in academia, the critics of science in the West tend to applaud the efforts of indigenous science movements in the ex-colonial world to produce, in Donna Haraway's phrase, "situated knowledges"—e.g., "Islamic" science, "Vedic" mathematics, "Indian" science, "Third World women's" science etc. They tend to see these movements as a justifiable reassertion of long-silenced traditions and as heroic attempts by the once-colonized civilizations to accommodate the forces of modernity on their own terms. There is undoubtedly some truth in this perception: the memory of colonialism and the fear of the fast encroaching "McWorld" have indeed lent a sense of urgency to the Third World's search for alternatives.

But if one examines the actual track record of the social movements that seek to encourage and implement culturally "authentic" science and technology, a very different and much more worrisome picture emerges. At their best, the indigenous science movements have spawned neo-populist, anti-modernization and anti-state agitations targeted indiscriminately against modern institutions and ideologies of Third World states (as in India). At their worst, they have actively joined forces with religious fundamentalists, as in most Islamic countries (and to some extent, at least indirectly, in India as well). Indeed, it is becoming harder by the day to discern much difference between the positions of the religious (generally on the right) and the secular (generally on the left) critics of science, technology and modernity in India and elsewhere in the Third World.

This paper is written in the strong belief that a cultural nationalism that turns against the internationalism of science is completely devoid of any progressive impulse, and for all its populist rhetoric, can only keep the people it claims to speak for in the bondage of age-old oppressions justified by ancient superstitions. As a Third World woman trained in "Western" science, I wish to reaffirm the words of the late Abdus Salaam, the Pakistani Nobel Laureate in physics:

> there is only one universal science, its problems and modalities are international and there is no such thing as Islamic science, just as

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there is no Hindu science, no Jewish science, no Confucian science, nor Christian science.

It may be appropriate here to disclose my personal investment in the defense of the universality of scientific knowledge and a scientific way of thinking. I learnt to do science as a young woman in India, received a doctorate in molecular biology, and later worked as a science writer in close collaboration with people's science movements in India and also in the United States. I sense a deep epistemological connection between modern science and a principled dissent from, and opposition to, all arbitrary authority; be it the authority of traditions, family, community or the state. It was this connection between a scientific skepticism and social dissent that I intuited when I left the lab for the newspaper office and for science activism. And it is this connection that I now want to defend—more self-consciously this time, now that I have the advantage of hind sight—against the radical science critics who would deny it.

II.

The idea that science, like all human knowledge, is socially and culturally mediated has a history that long predates postmodernism, but there are critical differences between today's social constructivism and earlier theories. The thesis of social construction of scientific knowledge traces its ancestry to the tradition of sociology of knowledge that includes such seminal figures as Karl Marx, Karl Mannheim, and more recently, Robert Merton. There are undoubtedly connections between these scholars and their latter-day, "post"-marked progeny—but with two crucial differences. None of the classical sociologists of science was an anti-realist. None of them ever denied that science, though always situated in specific social contexts, nevertheless helps us understand a reality that exists independently of our practices. And none treated the truth of scientific ideas as relative to the "prevailing regime of truth," as the current Foucaultian social theory would have it. While all classical sociologists of knowledge believed, with different theoretical emphases, that the logic of science works through context-bound social practices and

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institutions, they equally firmly held that the logic of science was, in the final instance, justified by empirical evidence from the real world, which could be obtained independently of the antecedent theoretical and social assumptions. Thus, while they made room for the undeniable fact that competing social interests could generate competing theories, they also believed the conflict would sooner or later be settled by further rational investigation of the entities and generative mechanisms that actually exist in nature.

Post-al sociologists sometimes like to drape themselves in the mantle of Marx, even as they declare Marxism to be essentialist, determinist, and hopelessly passé. Marx certainly holds the view that knowledge is socially mediated and that science is a social practice. But scientific knowledge for him always implies the objectivity of the material world, i.e. the independent reality of natural, and the (relatively independent) reality of social forms. Scientific knowledge emerges from an interplay between the social practice of science—the socially and historically located labor or cognitive work that goes into producing knowledge—and the material world that exists independently of human cognition. The historicity of knowledge for Marx is always in an ever-changing dialectical relation with the objectivity of the material world. A constant give-and-take between our historically located categories of thought and the world that exists independently of these categories continually transforms our categories of thought, putting them to the test of scientific experiment, and anchoring them with an increasing accuracy in the objects of the material world. As the physicist and Marxist historian of science, J.D. Bernal clearly saw, science is a "human activity, linked to all other human activities and continuously interacting with them." Yet, science also "transcends the means or the motives that helped step by step to build it up... [because] it is securely anchored in the material world, in the properties of animate and inanimate things."

The social constructivists ostensibly retain Marx's emphasis on the historicity of knowledge, without his emphasis on either the objectivity of the material reality, or our ability to arrive at increasingly truthful accounts of that reality

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through a constant revision of our scientific assumptions and practices. We begin to encounter a full-blown constructivist view of science in the early 1970s when, citing the ideas of Thomas Kuhn and Ludwig Wittgenstein, social theorists associated with Edinburgh University, especially David Bloor and Barry Barnes, began to propound what they called the "Strong Programme" (SP) of sociology of scientific knowledge. The SP and the various schools of science critique it helped to bring about (including the feminist and cultural studies of science) are strong on the historicity but weak on the objectivity of scientific knowledge, to the point that it has become impossible to discern any traces of the latter in their accounts of science. In fact, the paradoxical effect of postmodernist constructivist conceptions of knowledge is to make history itself unintelligible, so that we now have a conception of "historicity" without a conception of history. Postmodernism gives us neither the epistemological standards to judge, say, Newtonian physics as better than pre-Copernican science, nor the means to situate the development of science in an intelligible historical process.

The net result is that constructivists end up admonishing us to give up such outmoded notions as truth as a correspondence with a mind-independent reality. All knowledge claims should be explained "symmetrically" regardless of their truth or falsity. The demand for symmetry means that a person's reason for holding a belief is to be explained in terms of locally operating (sociological) causes and not in terms of the character of the belief itself (e.g., whether true or false in terms of correspondence with some aspect of reality). The latter would amount to an a priori assumption that it is the reality that fixes beliefs and would rule out an impartial examination of how social relations allowed a statement to be "stabilized" as true. Such "stabilization," furthermore, is seen as a highly flexible process in which the social identities of knowers play a crucial role. The outcome of any scientific inquiry is not compelled by the evidence of our senses and experiments (which are theory-laden and can justify more than one conclusion) but by the socially driven choices, inter-

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pretations and negotiations of the inquirers.[2] Science is thus seen as social "all the way down."

The relativistic and pseudo-radical logic of social construction was revealed for all to see by the tongue-in-cheek postmodern rendition of a "liberatory" quantum gravity by the physicist Alan Sokal that appeared recently in *Social Text*. So taken-for-granted is the postmodernist incredulity toward reason's capacity to understand the causal mechanisms of the physical world, that the following (intentionally) outrageous claim by Sokal failed to raise any warning flags for the editors of *Social Text*:

> It has become increasingly apparent that physical "reality," no less than social "reality" is at bottom a social and linguistic construct; that scientific "knowledge," far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it, that truth claims of science are inherently theory-laden, and that the discourse of the scientific community, for all its undeniable value, cannot assert a privileged epistemological status with respect to the counterhegemonic narratives emanating from dissident or marginalized communities.

The ideas Sokal satirizes are exactly the ideas that the cultural nationalists from the Third World uncritically and respectfully borrow from the social constructivists and other radical historicists of science. And once all reality is seen as a social construct and all knowledge as encoding dominant ideologies, it follows that modern science can make no valid claims to be universally true. Only when this proposition is accepted does it become possible to talk of "Hindu science," "non-Western science," "feminist science," all claiming objectivity from their own internal standards.

Thus it has come to pass that amid self-righteous chants of anti-imperialist solidarity with the West's silenced and exploited "Other," the social constructivist, postmodern and self-professed "post-colonial" academics and activists in the West and in Third World are united in the idea that modern science is not a unity. Rather they see it as merely an "ethnoscience" of the West, constituted out of the contextual values of the West, and thus without any justifiable claim to truth beyond the supposed boundaries of its birthplace, "the West."

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As a Western discourse, modern science is seen as "inherently" inimical to the development and flourishing of other local knowledge systems, which are assumed to be grounded in the supposedly more benign assumptions of non-Western social orders.

Seen in this light, it makes sense that Third World people should fashion a science that is appropriate to their own civilizational imperatives, cultural meanings, and ways of knowing. One demand that recurs time and again with desperate urgency in the fast growing genre of postcolonial science critique is to give up the modernist attempts to assimilate modern science into local cultures, and to create entirely new sciences in which the very facts of nature will be different, for they will derive their legitimation as facts from a world view that is organically and authentically related to the "way of life" of people living in these societies. The new non-Western sciences will operate with different criteria of rationality, objectivity, and truth, criteria furnished by their own aims, values, and conceptual categories. Thus it is not the case that these sciences are any less objective or factual, but only that the validity of their truth must be judged not in comparison with the western sciences but "in their own terms."

As we shall see in the next section, the political implications of this "radical" equation of modern science with the West are not lost on the resurgent neo-traditionalist and religious fundamentalist movements. These movements seek salvation not in a rational world view locally and a democratic internationalism globally, but in assertions of civilizational autonomy through a reconstruction of their own respective ethno-knowledges. When modern science is understood as local knowledge, at all times perfectly porous to the social assumptions of the imperializing West, it is not surprising at all that the opposition to imperialism should be turned into an opposition to modern science and technology, as has increasingly happened in the alternative science movements in the Third World. I will argue, next, that whatever else it may be, this project of the social deconstruction of science is no friend of the people of the Third World, who need to appropriate modern science in order to question and get rid of all

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oppressive ideas and structures, be they Western imports or authentic domestic products made up of "their own" assumptions and value.

III.

In defending both scientific rationality and its crucial importance for social change, I am in a way defending a personal and deeply transformative experience I have had of doing science and working as a science popularizer. I count doing science as one of the most formative experiences of my life. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that training in modern science marked the beginning of humanism and feminism for me. My training in biology demolished once and for all ideas of social hierarchies and differences that were deeply entrenched in my middle class Hindu milieu.

My double consciousness of tradition and modern science is in fact quite commonplace in the rapidly changing societies in the Third World. Like many of my fellow first-generation, post-independence citizens of once-colonized countries, I came of age in India in a thoroughly hybrid cosmopolis: the education in modern "Western" sciences that I was fortunate enough to receive shaped my ideas of the natural order, the cosmos; while the social order, the polis, of my birth and my place in it as a woman of my caste and class background was grounded in the local, largely Hindu, customs and knowledge systems.

This hybrid cosmopolis, far from being an impossibility (as the holists among sociologists suggest), or a prison-house of Western-masculinist imperialism (as the cultural nationalists among Third World intellectuals claim) was experienced by some of us as truly emancipatory. Our scientific understanding of the cosmos gave us the resources to question the grounds of some of the cultural practices of our polis, and win a modicum of autonomy for ourselves. Contrary to those who see science as "inherently Western," science made perfect sense to me growing up in my small and rather provincial city in Punjab. I did not find scientific explanations of the natural world as alien or oppressive. Sure, they did not sit well with the traditional rationalizations of Karma, caste, and the infe-

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riority of women as "facts of nature." But if this is what "violence" and cultural dissonance caused by "Westernization" is all about, I suggest that we have more of it!

More seriously, I am perfectly aware of the risk I am running of being misunderstood as lumping those who attack modern science with a better future society in mind, together with those who defend the status quo with all its injustices. I fully recognize that the secular social critics of science and modernity in the West and in the Third World are no apologists for the traditional naturalizations of inequities. They are as much—if not more—actively engaged in a variety of new social movements against social injustices based on identities (*gender, caste and ethnicity*) that the traditional, more class-based progressive movements had failed to address directly. Indeed, both through personal associations and through their written works, I know these critics of science to be motivated by deeply egalitarian, democratic, and anti-racist sentiments. As far as I know, major alternative science movements (in India, at least) have no overt sympathy and/or working relations with the religious conservatives and their divisive agendas, and most of them (again, speaking only of India), have been at the forefront of feminist, civil-rights, and anti-communal movements. Those among the new social movements that take the anti-essentialism of postmodernist ideas seriously, moreover, have no truck with the false unified civilizational imperatives that the religious fundamentalists are projecting on to the diverse and plural polities of places like India.

Thus, I have no intention whatsoever of playing a game of more-progressive-than-thou with those whose views on science I disagree with. What I do intend is to ask if the means they have chosen can actually realize the political ends they favor: that is, if the idealistic, anti-rationalist, and anti-realist theories of knowledge they have come to embrace can advance their political goals, which presumably include full autonomy of the individual and a society without prejudice and injustice. Is it not more likely that by relativizing all knowledge to the existing cultural discourses and social arrangements, they deprive themselves of the very ground

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needed to critically appraise the existing cultural traditions that are not hospitable to these political ideals?

I wholly agree with the critics of science that modern science will never give us the ultimate and final answers to the mysteries of the world, and that human relations should not be patterned after the mechanisms of nature revealed by science. I also see, of course, the many ways in which modern science can be and has been used destructively. Yet the fact remains that modern science has developed a method of constant self-critique in the light of systematic observation and experimentation on nature that gives us good reasons to reject some views as false reports of the world. I believe that progressive politics is impossible without a sifting of truth from falsehood. A discursive egalitarianism that refrains from criticizing objectively false beliefs because they happen to be held by the more traditional "masses" actually impedes the struggle for real and substantive equality. Egalitarianism and truth need each other, and if truth is left to be decided by the often deeply inegalitarian standards of the community that holds it, it is not clear how these standards themselves can ever be questioned.

To return to my own experience with science as a source of personal values and social philosophy: my experience of finding personal courage and intellectual strength in science and my disillusionment with the elitist agenda of the scientific establishment in India inclined me to take an active interest in people's science movements. The early 1980s (when I was completing my Ph.D.) was a time of soul-searching in the scientific community in India, with many active "science for people" groups springing up on university campuses and scientific research institutions. These groups provided working scientists an opportunity to participate in the life of the community through active alliances with consciousness-raising and educational initiatives in villages and urban slums.

This was also the time, it must be mentioned, when the first audible rumblings of the organized nationalist/culturalist opposition to science and modernity began to be heard in the form of an active opposition to the idea of the "scientific temper" from well-known neo-Gandhian intellectuals in

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Delhi and Madras. In the intervening decade-and-a-half, political upheavals (above all the disappearance of the Soviet Union), problems thrown up by rapid and uneven modernization, and the "post"-marked intellectual trends that emphasize cultural autonomy over cosmopolitanism have all contributed to the ascendancy of the cultural nationalist, "patriotic science" tendency which is critical of modern "Western" science and technology as "inherently" anti-people. The people's science movements are berated as remnants of die-hard rationalists and "communists" who do not understand and respect the cultural traditions and religiosity of the people, with even sympathetic critics urging an accommodation with the "patriotic" tendencies.

Such dismissals of people's science movements ignore the countless young and idealistic men and women in India from all walks in life, including my colleagues in research institutions, who may not be card-carrying members of any political party but who are drawn to these movements in the hope of using the findings of modern "Western" science rationally to criticize some of the most illiberal elements of their local traditional values and social arrangements.

"Science for social revolution" is the motto of one of the most prominent people's science movements in India, the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) with 40,000 active members and nearly 1500 science clubs in small towns and villages in the state of Kerala. There are many other science-based, consciousness raising groups, some of them recognized nationally for their innovative educational methods in science, especially the central-India based Eklavya and the now closed Kishore Bharati, which in 1972 formed the nucleus of the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Program (HSTP), a program that has now spread to more than 500 schools. For each such nationally recognized program, there are numerous others working in relative anonymity.

The objective of groups like KSSP, HSTP, and other such groups is to develop a critical scientific attitude that puts inherited knowledge to the test of empirical evidence. Toward that end, these groups promote education in modern scientific ideas, especially those derived from modern "Western"

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biology (spontaneous generation vs. germ theory, the genetic basis of the sex of the fetus, the similarity of the genetic material in all life etc.), the theory of evolution and the Newtonian laws of physics and relate them to the everyday life of people through all available cultural means, from class rooms, to art fairs, songs, street corner theater, and "science processions." Examples include thousands of astronomy classes offered by KSSP in rural areas when Halley's comet came close to the earth in 1986, or the Hoshangabad groups encouraging local students to trace the parasite that had caused a nationwide panic over a "curse" on green vegetables. Although they make no secret of their support for a scientific temperament, these groups are careful not to present science as a complete polar opposite of religion, but to suggest that deeply religious people like Isaac Newton, C.V. Raman, and Ramanujan could be great scientists as well. Neither can these groups be seen as uncritical science enthusiasts. Instead, their emphasis is on wise and egalitarian uses of science, which sometimes leads them actively to oppose some ecologically disastrous development projects. The overall project of "science for social revolution" is similar in spirit to feminist consciousness raising, only in this case it takes place mostly in non-metropolitan areas, in villages, in small make shift schools in rural and urban areas, among women in the slums, among the farm workers and among bonded laborers. It is no different in spirit than the coffee-houses, learned academies, salons, and lending libraries that sprung up all across Europe, not just among the urban elite but also in the rural areas and small towns during the Enlightenment.

It is both the desirability and the very possibility of just such a critical empiricism—a scientific temper—that has been severely questioned by the rise of the social constructivist theories of science among academics and activists alike. In tune with, and often borrowing from, the Western critics of the Enlightenment—from (the all too well understood) Heidegger, Nietzsche, Foucault to (the much misunderstood) Kuhn and the post-Kuhnian feminist and ecological critics which abound in the academy—Indian, Islamic, and other non-Western critics have declared that faith in the power of

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reason to know the truth about the world is the cause and not the solution of the "pathology" of modern western scientific thinking. They see the people's science movements' emphasis on critical rationality as a sign of the "contempt" felt by alienated modern intellectuals for the traditions of the masses, and science as simply a Western superstition which the modernizers wish to substitute for the popular superstitions that give meaning to people. The solution, both for the West and the rest, is to turn to the "older civilizations" where rationality is subordinated to other cultural imperatives and values, including, of course, the values prescribed by religion, mysticism, and the lost Gnostic traditions.

While intellectual discourse has taken such a turn toward a "re-enchantment" and the subordination of scientific reason to the authority of traditions, it should come as no surprise that the religious revivalists have begun to dominate politics in many parts of the non-Western world. While the Indian left has been busy theorizing the "de-colonization of knowledge," the revivalist Hindu forces have succeeded in actually carrying out the decolonization of mathematics and the history of science. In the states where they came to power, the Hindu revivalist parties decreed the replacement of modern mathematics with an apparently fraudulent version of "Vedic mathematics." Likewise, the revivalists have succeeded in revising the history of science and technology in order to incorporate more nationalistic elements. But this is only a mild case of re-enchantment as compared to the situation in Pakistan where the clergy has a lot more say in what will be taught, including, according to the physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy, strictures on weather and astronomical predictions. In this situation, the intellectual climate, as Hoodbhoy puts it in an understatement, is "not particularly propitious for free thinking and science."

IV.

I reject the idea that scientific knowledge is merely a social and cultural construct of the West for one very simple reason: it completely misdescribes the science I did in the lab and the science I did on the streets as an activist and a writer

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in New Delhi in the mid 1980s. The various "post"-marked theories of social construction of science, and their more popular versions circulating among the alternative science movements in the Third World simply have no theoretical and normative categories to explain the project of "science for social revolution." The sociology of scientific knowledge lacks the vocabulary to describe the hybrid vigor of the cosmopolis I and others in science for people's movements experienced. The most avant-garde constructivist theorists of science, who claim to speak in the name of deeper democracy and fuller human emancipation, completely invalidate a very real and a very liberatory experience of those of us in progressive science movements.

It is one thing to embrace a "cultural relativism" that respects the variety of human culture. It is quite another to make these varied cultural values the sole or principal standard of truth, so that truth is simply what coheres with a particular system of beliefs, instead of some correspondence between beliefs and a world that exists independently of them. Postmodernist critics of science have tended to adopt the latter kind of cultural relativism. According to their type of relativism, a correspondence theory of truth, which inevitably makes universalistic claims, does "violence" and is the source of intolerance, colonialism and even totalitarianism. The only solution they favor is to recognize the situatedness and partiality of all knowledge, including that of modern science—and then let a thousand sciences bloom. For obvious reasons, the epistemic charity the social constructivists extend to other knowledge systems has a great attraction for those who wish to replace "Western" science with their own sciences. But this charity is of the most dubious variety, and I will argue that the Third World must stoutly refuse any part of it.

This kind of relativism is precisely the reason why social constructionism fails to empower those—e.g., non-Western peoples—whose beliefs it wishes to affirm. Such "affirmation" may affirm the cultural chauvinists, but it is far from liberatory: people fighting for their right to a decent life do not need condescending affirmations of their ways of knowing, as much as they need new cultural discourses that will open up new

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possibilities for new kinds of social relations. A struggling humanity needs a richer kind of empathy that includes respect but also critique; love but also anger. Because postmodernist relativism is generous with the first but stingy with the second, it ends up subverting its own progressive impulses. It ends up providing aid and comfort to any particularistic cosmology which may demand that it be judged on its "own terms" of what constitutes justified belief. Understood purely from within a given framework, and with no external standard of truth, it is hard to see how any view could be wrong and any practice unjust. Indeed, as Norman Geras points out, if truth is wholly internalized to particular discourses or social practices, we cannot recognize victims' reports of their suffering as injustice, but only as so many stories of injustice.

V.

Most social constructivists do not deny that external reality exists, that scientists interact with it in their experiments and discourse about it through their publications and conferences etc. These critics only deny that the external reality determines, in the last instance, the truth or falsity of scientific knowledge. Of course they admit that the "real" world exists and that the real physical world is independent of what we think about it. But the acknowledgment of the real world is only an idle addition—a "fig leaf," as the philosopher Michael Devitt has called it—to the constructivist view of knowledge, for constructivism gives the real world a diminutive role in fixing scientists' beliefs.

But social constructivists, like all of us, would not want to defy the law of gravity by jumping out of the 21st floor of a building, as Alan Sokal keeps reminding them: they are perfectly aware of the bounds set by the real world on most of our activities, interpretations, and choices. How, then, do they justify reducing the real world to a fig leaf when it comes to scientific knowledge? The answer lies in what the British realist philosopher Roy Bhaskar calls the "epistemic fallacy": the failure to distinguish between an objective reality and the ways in which we represent or describe it. Here, the "real" world does not act as a check on our knowledge. On the

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contrary, our (historically and culturally variable) knowledge constitutes reality—or, as Steven Woolgar proclaims, "how we know determines what exists." In that sense, social constructivists allow no difference between the laws of physics and socially created objects (say a dollar bill or the rules of baseball): both are what they are because we agree to think of them as such. It is as if not only the science of physics were historically located and changeable but the natural objects to which it refers were historically variable too.

The epistemic fallacy connects theories of social construction with postmodern theories of knowledge more generally. Both share one fundamental assumption, the assumption Philip Kitcher has called the IRA, the "Inaccessibility of Reality Argument." According to this argument, we cannot step out of language (or more broadly, our conceptual framework) to see reality in itself. "There is no God's eye view," as one often hears in postmodern discourse. IRA directly leads to the epistemic fallacy; the real, knowable world coincides with, and is confined within, the boundaries of our socially determined and limited frameworks. Anything that falls outside our discourses cannot be known by human reason. This makes the ordinary work of science seem god-like—impossible, transcendent, and full of hubris.

Given the fallacious assumption that the real is only what we can know and say about it, social constructionism presents itself as the only humanly possible, socially situated and nontranscendental, naturalistic account of science. (That is why, as became obvious in the recent flap over Sokal's hoax, science studies scholars bristled at the notion that they were against science). But my problem with this account of science is that it removes from science all that makes it worth doing and all that makes it empowering for those who question the despotism of superstitions all around the world.

VI.

What, then, can be done? What is the way out of the quandary?

Social constructivists have led us into a blind alley, but the philosophical problems they invoke to make their case are

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by no means trivial. It is a fact, long recognized by the critics of empiricism (notably Karl Popper) much before postmodernism appeared on the scene, that there are no theory-free observations. Observations do not just jump out of the real world and compel our inferences. It is a fact that sensory perception by itself is not sufficient to give us access to the unobservable world of atoms and DNA and tectonic plates which science claims to have discovered. We do see the world through the conceptual categories available to us in any given place, culture, and time. We cannot indeed strip ourselves of all assumptions and rise above it all to see the world in its own terms and compare it with what we think about it and then decide if we are right or wrong, whether our facts match with the world or not.

A return to a naive empiricism that takes observation to be innocent of theory and social assumptions is neither possible nor necessary. I believe that it is possible to accept all these assumptions and yet deny that science cannot give us an explanation of the causal mechanisms of the real world which exists apart from our views about it, or that scientific knowledge is made up of contextual values and choices of culture-bound scientists. A relativist social constructionism is not the only alternative left after the realization that all thought is socially mediated, and all observations derive their evidentiary force from the theoretical assumptions of the inquirer. A third alternative to both empiricism and social constructionism exists, namely, contextual realism.

I have offered a detailed philosophical defense of contextual realism elsewhere,[3] and I can say only this much about it here. I believe that it is perfectly possible to defend a realism that can distinguish truth from superstition, and justify preferring the former not simply in terms of coherence (or "solidarity" as Rorty calls it) with a particular community of knowers (i.e. western scientists), but in terms of how accurately it maps onto, and—yes—corresponds to some part of what there is in the world. The contextual realism I defend argues that, contrary to postmodernist assumptions, such a mapping between our theories and the world does not require us to secure an Archimedean point, or a God's eye view, which

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is outside of all social practices, language and cultural categories. Indeed, postmodernists have sent us on a fool's errand by making such impossible demands of scientific knowledge.

Scientific objectivity need not satisfy an impossible ideal of neutrality. History- and context-bound inquirers, with all their biases, interests, and other flaws can still get to know the world through a process of constant revision of our conceptual schemes and our observations of the world in the light of each other. Through a relentless critique and revision of our conceptual categories in the light of new evidence (which is justified in the light of some other theories in the web of theories that make up a science), it is perfectly possible to transcend the limits of our inherited frameworks and to obtain a more complete picture of the natural and social world whose validity transcends the context of its production.

We all—in the East or in the West—share the same natural world. Any advance in deciphering the common book of nature anywhere is an advance for all of us.

NOTES

1. The near universal eagerness with which non-Western societies have in fact tried to cultivate modern science is explained away solely as a result of colonial and neo-colonial influences. For a recent statement of science as colonial, see Sandra Harding, "Is Science Multicultural? Challenges, Resources, Opportunities, Uncertainties," *Configurations*, 1994, 2:301-330. Among the numerous Third World champions of this view, see Ziauddin Sardar (Ed.) *The Revenge of Athena: Science, Exploitation and The Third World* (Mansell Publishing Ltd., London, 1988), Ashis Nandy (ed.) *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford, 1990) and Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive* (London: Zed Press, 1988).
2. Both theory-dependence of facts and under-determination are true, but in actual lab work, they by no means make the enterprise of science as circular and question-begging as social constructivists assume.
3. Meera Nanda, "Restoring the Real: Rethinking Social Constructivist Theories of Science." Forthcoming in *Socialist Register*.

For a complete set of Notes including the sources of all quotations, etc., see the longer version of this article in *In Defense of History*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

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CUBA TODAY AND THE FUTURE OF CUBAN SOCIALISM
A Response to the Observations of William Smaldone

by AL CAMPBELL

In the April 1996 issue of this magazine, William Smaldone presented his observations and interpretations from his participation in the Seventh Conference of North American and Cuban Philosophers and Social Scientists in Cuba in June 1995. This brief article is motivated by the following two considerations:

1) There have been a number of changes in Cuba over the last year that impact on several of the issues considered by Smaldone. Among these are an improved economy, a decision by the leadership of the revolution to increase the attention paid to political work and the goal of socialism,[1] and increased statistical information on the extent of the economic downturn in the early 1990s. This article will discuss these recent developments.

2) Smaldone's title "Observations on the Cuban Revolution" correctly suggested the nature of his article as a series of observations and reflections. What was not clear in the article was what the author thought the sum of his observations had to say about the overall situation in Cuba, specifically

Al Campbell teaches economics at the University of Utah. He would particularly like to thank Cliff DuRand, who has been the sparkplug for the past nine yearly meetings in Cuba, that gave rise to Bill Smaldone's article and this response. Beyond thanks or the many interesting discussions on theory and practice in Cuba, he would like to thank DuRand for his dedication to the project of keeping open a window of contact between U.S. citizens and Cubans in the face of persistent efforts by the U.S. government to make such contacts as difficult and limited as possible.

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in regards to the long term Cuban goal of attempting to build socialism. Each observation was presented clearly, each tree was sketched sharply. But what was the nature of the forest?

Five Important Issues on Cuba and Socialism

In this section I will briefly consider five points discussed by Smaldone. My real concern of course goes beyond what I consider to be correcting this particular article. I believe that what I consider to be errors and prejudices in Smaldone's vision of Cuba are common among many progressives and leftists in the United States. Beyond that, I think that many progressives and leftists in the United States do not appreciate the importance of the discussions and experiments on social structure now going on in Cuba to the current worldwide debate on the desired nature of socialism.

Point 1. "In many ways socialist Cuba must now rethink its project from scratch." (p. 21) This is certainly not the situation Cuba faces, and understanding the way the real situation differs from this is essential for understanding the possibilities for Cuba to transcend the present problems, in a way directed toward socialism. What is true is that Cuba must now rethink all aspects of what it thought of before as its goal of socialism, and that some of these aspects will be rejected, while others will be maintained. That is in fact being done throughout the country. What is not correct is that they must do so "from scratch." Essential to the Cubans' ability to get through the present difficulties in a way consistent with their goal of building socialism is what they achieved from 1959 to 1989. On the one hand there was the impressive economic growth (quite different from the picture of economic performance generally held in the United States). On the other hand there was sweeping economic transformation.

It is worth pointing to a number of careful and balanced studies of the growth and transformation of the Cuban economy since 1959, because many on the left who are sympathetic with Cuba's goals have bought into the "Cuba has done a lot to provide basic services to its poor but its economy has always been a mess" description. The six articles on the economy in *Transformation and Struggle* (1990, Halebsky and Kirk, eds.,

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Praeger) constitute one set of such studies, in English, collected in one place, that gives a many sided appreciation of the extent of the transformation. Their titles reflect the diversity of the aspects of the economic transformation addressed: "The Cuban Economy: a Current Assessment" by Jose Luís Rodríguez (now Minister of the Economy and Planning), Agricultural Policy with Social Justice and Development" and "The Supply of Consumer Goods in Cuba" by Egenio Balari, "Agricultural Production Cooperatives and Cuban Socialism" by Mieke Meurs, "Cuba's Economic Diversification: Progress and Shortcomings" by Andrew Zimbalist, and "Some Reflections on the Cuban Economic Model" by Claus Brundenius. The most careful study on Cuban growth is *The Cuban Economy: Measurement and Analysis of Socialist Performance* by Andrew Zimbalist. In his work cited above, Brundenius draws on Zimbalist's calculations to conclude that notwithstanding the uncertainty of transforming from the Soviet system of economic measurement to the GDP system, Cuba's economic growth from 1960 to 1985 was the second highest in Latin America, behind only Brazil. While there is room to justifiably argue over details in the conversion, figures like this belie the typical picture propagated in in the United States of the Cuban economy as a basket case.

Arguably more important than either of these material changes is the transformation of the Cuban people in the process. One only has to spend a few days talking to Cubans in the streets to understand the central importance of this for meeting the present challenges. Concern with equality, justice, and solidarity is not just something to trot out on May Day, but something encountered daily, not only in speeches by the political leadership, but also in private discussions with "average Cubans." This concern was one (not the only) important factor used to judge the appropriateness of concrete social policies. It should be noted that the present reflection in Cuba on the meaning of these concepts is both complicated and rich, as witnessed by the broad social discussion around "excessive egalitarianism" and "paternalism." My point here, however, is only to stress that the "consciousness" that has resulted from 35 years of living the revolution is a real and

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important factor in determining the future, and attempts to find new structures and institutions suitable to build socialism under the present conditions do not have to start "from scratch."

Point 2. Sugar Dependency. "[T]he economy remains largely dependent on sugar production for foreign exchange." (p. 22) In 1994 tourism grossed $850 million, surpassing sugar at $800 million for the first time. In 1995 tourism climbed to $1 billion, and $1.3 billion in 1996. Tourism has a very high foreign leakage from imported inputs and repatriation of profits (perhaps 2/3), but Castro put the borrowing for the 1995 and 1996 sugar harvest at $300 million (with $50 million interest charges), so leakages there are also quite high. In 1995 nickel earned $90.8 million, tobacco and cigars earned about $100 million, and pharmaceutical and biotech exports, essentially nonexistent in 1989, brought in $100 million in 1994. Basic industry as a whole earned $415 million. Sugar is still very important, but the economy is far from being "largely dependent on sugar for foreign exchange."

Point 3. Overly centralized economic planning. Smaldone introduces an attack on the pre 1990 planning system as overly centralized on the basis of observations of paint and repair shortages in Havana. He asked a number of Cuban political economists why there was no paint, and not one of them was able to give an answer. On this basis, he reached the following conclusion: "It seems to me most likely that the problem is rooted not in the shortage of any particular paint ingredient, but rather in a planning process that is overly centralized...." (p. 23) That conclusion does not seem to follow, and seems rather a reflection of a widespread prejudice among many U.S. leftists that any planned economy will by nature be overcentralized, and the only antidote is the introduction of markets to replace many of the functions of planners.

The failure of the state to provide paint and cement to homeowners in Havana in anything approaching sufficient quantities is a fact. But it is not appropriate to use this fact as an example of the problem of overcentralization, for it can be explained with no reference to the latter. Two factors were

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involved. First, as a response to previous underdevelopment and unequal development in Cuba, the Cubans decided to prioritize housing in the countryside over housing in Havana, and to prioritize social projects and new factories over housing. Both paint and cement production and consumption skyrocketed over the course of the revolution. It indeed did not get to houses in Havana, but that was a result of the social priorities adopted. Any system, however decentralized, that shared those goals would have similarly undersupplied Havana.

Second, Cuba did make a decision to channel much more of the large amounts of paint and cement that it produced into new construction than into repair. The amount of new housing (and factories) they built in and around Havana (not to talk of the rest of the country) over the course of the revolution is very impressive (though below what was needed). From a narrow economic point of view, I believe that on the basis of efficiency considerations, they undersupplied resources to repairs. The issue here is not centralization, but rather a wrong choice of economic priorities. For the same priorities, if all the municipalities had made decisions on the use of paint and cement instead of a central ministry of construction, the result would have been the same.

In an endnote below I will return to this problem of housing repairs in the discussion on democracy, and bring out what I think is a problem in how the Cubans have dealt with it since the mid 1980s. Here my concern is only to argue that overcentralization is not the problem in this case, and to warn against a tendency by U.S. leftists to see overcentralization as the root of many problems without seriously studying those problems.

Point 4. Ownership. "[T]he problem of maintaining buildings, like that of maintaining or increasing production, is also a psychological one, and here the issue of ownership assumes great importance.... Since people do not feel like the owners of their homes or workplaces, they are not motivated to get things done." (p. 23) Smaldone sees the problem as a "lack of a sense of ownership." (p. 23) If so, the implied solution is private property (perhaps by small groups, such as co-ops, but in any case private property). In fact, Smaldone

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has mixed together here two different problems in Cuba, and a careful examination of one of these argues against the root of the problem being "a sense of ownership." 80 percent of Cubans own their own homes, above the rate in the United States. So although much housing indeed is run down, above all in Havana, "ownership" is not the reason.

As opposed to housing, factories are publicly owned. There a broad discussion is occurring on the real problem of a significant (but far from universal) part of the work force "not caring." The focus is directly on the problem, "a sense of responsibility" for what happens in their workplace. In the tradition of Hayak and von Mises and their contemporary offspring, Smaldone[2] jumps from "a sense of responsibility" to "ownership." I hold that the Cubans are correct in rejecting, and Smaldone is (and too many other U.S. leftists are) wrong in buying into this piece of capitalist ideology about human nature, that only ownership can engender a sense of responsibility.

Point 5. Democracy. In a section titled "Democracy Crucial" (a statement I entirely concur with), Smaldone concluded that "While the boundaries of intellectual and political discussion are expanding, it is also apparent that Cuba's democratic institutions remain weak." (p. 31) But he then goes on to give only two pieces of information to support this sweeping claim. One is that candidates for office do not run on a platform (or as a member of any party), but rather on the basis of what they have done for society in the past. He only presented a very shallow defense of that position (a Cuban argued "it avoids demagoguery and false promises, it's better to go with who you trust"), and then concluded that "I was not convinced." The most cursory consideration of platform politics in the United States makes it clear that platform politics are no guarantee that majority concerns will be reflected, or even addressed.[3] While the root of the problem with democracy in the United States (in my opinion) resides in capitalism, there are deep theoretical issues worth considering about platform politics in any setting. When legislators have to deal with scores of issues, including socially important issues that have not yet been posed at the time of elections,

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there is a breakdown of the idea that people running on a platform get elected on the basis of an ability to reflect the voters' preferences. For the process to be democratic, voters would need to be made aware of how candidates would vote on each issue that may arise. Even if one leaves out the insurmountable problem of the issues not yet defined, given the multiplicity of issues it is probable that no two candidates would have the same platform. To try to collapse all this to what two or five parties decide are the defining issues cannot be taken *a priori* as the best way to assure that the wishes of the electorate will get carried out. Given that there is no model anywhere in the real world of an electoral system based on platform politics that is acceptably democratic, it cannot be simply assumed that platform politics necessarily yield performance that is more in line with the wishes of the electorate than electing people who have proved themselves by serving the people. It is an open and important question about democracy for proponents of socialism to grapple with. Hence the absence of platform politics certainly cannot be used as evidence for such a sweeping conclusion as Cuba's having "weak democratic institutions."

Smaldone's second basis for concluding that democratic institutions are weak in Cuba is that "[Cuban trade unions] are already excluded from joint ventures in tourism though it is exactly in such enterprises where it is particularly important for workers to have a voice." (p. 32) It is ironic that he chose trade unions to point to the weakness of democracy in Cuba. Not only is trade union participation near universal among the workers in Cuba, but their voice in influencing what happens both in Cuban work sites and throughout Cuban society is very important.[4] In the year leading up to the 17th congress of the Central Organization of Cuban Trade Unions (CTC) in April 1996, workers in (essentially) all work sites throughout Cuba discussed 168 theses on the road forward for Cuba. This was not some staged top-down charade: 70,000 proposals were made from the grass roots during the process, and a large number of these led to changes in the final form of the theses. At the congress itself, again there was

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broad participation: there were 600 commentaries (or speeches) from the 1,900 delegates.

Contrary to the belief that such gatherings are orchestrated cheerleading sessions for government policies, the discussion was neither restricted to "worker topics" nor were the interventions dominantly "hurrah for us" presentations. The first thing one is struck with on reading the 168 theses is the breadth of the topics covered, something we who live in the United States and champion the struggles of working people for job security and better wages sometimes forget is central to visions of socialism. The people who produce the wherewithal for the society to survive and advance should have a voice in all social policies. As a weak substitute for reading the whole work, a listing of the 12 groups that the 168 theses were divided into will give some idea of the breadth of the issues addressed: The world, the workers, and the situation in Cuba; Our strategy does not lead to capitalism; Fighting for an efficient and competitive economy; The decisive effort to increase sugar production; The problem of unemployment and the reorganization of the labor force; Workers' wages; Union action regarding collective contract agreements and labor legislation; Working for the consolidation and triumph of the UBPCs (the new co-ops created from old state farms); Unions are by and for the workers; Defending the revolution means guaranteeing our power; Maintaining unity in the ranks of the workers.

Cuban congresses of any of the mass organizations have always been places where critics have stood up and disagreed with government policy. Carollee Bengelsdorf described[5] "what amounted to a dramatic and virtual confrontation between the base and the center over issues that focused upon and spunoff the matter of housing construction, repair, and maintenance" at the June 1978 National Assembly meeting. One saw the same type of worker disagreement with government policy (though at a much lower level of conflict) on tourism at April's CTC congress. My experience in Cuba (and that of most other observers I have spoken with) indicates that the majority of Cubans accept the present promotion of tourism as necessary, but they basically dislike it. The prosti-

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tution associated with tourism is a particularly sore point, but their dislike of tourism goes well beyond that. In line with this general Cuban feeling, a number of delegates spoke out at the congress against boosting tourism, one of the central pillars of the government's economic recovery program. Public disagreement by workers in Cuba with government policies is easy to document. Once it has been established that this exists, the next important question to ask is what effect it has.

Cynics will of course dismiss both the breadth of the issues discussed and the public disagreement with government policy as lots of talk that will have no effect. In the first place, I find it hard to imagine how directly involving around a quarter the population, and the majority of the working class at that, in discussing the future of the society could not at a minimum have some effect on the consciousness of the workers, and through that on the direction of social evolution. Carefully quantizing the nature of the government response to disagreements raised at meetings like these is likely impossible, and certainly hasn't been done. Bengelsdorf refers to several important changes that occurred in the years following the 1978 meeting referred to above, and concluded that "the public structured discussion of the issue had, by 1982, generated a variety of measures designed exactly to alleviate the severity of the problem."[6] It appears that the workers' concern with tourism as expressed at the April 1996 congress and other forums did engender a government response. In spring 1996 prostitution at the tourist centers was cracked down on. While the problem certainly was not eliminated, and in any case the concern with tourism goes far beyond prostitution, the dramatic reduction in visible prostitution at tourist centers that I noticed in June 1996 was a widely popular move in Cuba. An attack on Cuban democracy because working people and the unions there do not have a voice or influence is not a convincing argument.

Democracy in Cuba is certainly not perfect, as the Cubans themselves constantly remark. Improving democracy is one of the most widely discussed topics in academia and the government.[7] But at the same time, the past should not be viewed as some totalitarian regime. There is a rich history of

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attempts to build further democracy in various spheres over the course of the last 35 years, in a way that had to differ from a number of aspects of democracy as it exists in capitalist countries. These attempts should be studied for both their strengths and weaknesses. In any case, democracy in Cuba should not be lightly dismissed because of a particular policy toward hiring by a small part of foreign capital (especially when one recalls that at present less than 5 percent of all workers work in jobs connected to foreign capital, and only a small part of these are hired directly by the foreign enterprises).

While the bulk of the writing on Cuban democracy is vacuous rantings by the U.S. right,[8] there are nevertheless a number of thoughtful works on the subject. A few easily accessible works that I particularly recommend for anyone really interested in this complex issue are: *Work and Democracy in Socialist Cuba* by Linda Fuller, 1992; "Democracy in Cuba" by Sheryl Lutjens and "Bureaucracy Versus Democracy in Contemporary Cuba: An Assessment of Thirty Years of Organizational Development" by Richard Harris, both in *Cuba in Transition,* Sandor Halebsky and John Kirk, eds, 1992; *The Cuban Revolution in Crisis* by Frank Fitzgerald, 1994 (especially chapters 6 and 7); "Representative Government in Cuba" and "Worker's Parliaments" by Peter Roman in *Latin American Perspectives (LAP* issues 76 and 87), respectively; and "The Future of Democracy in Cuba" by Joel Edelstein, also in *LAP* (issue 87).

Conclusion

I am continually amazed by the lack of serious attention the U.S. left pays to Cuba. I do not assert that Cuba (or any other country) has ever been a perfect model of a transition to socialism, to be mechanically copied over onto the United States. Over the course of the last 35 years Cuba has not only made errors in the process of constructing socialism, but serious errors. To give a specific example, I think a number of the parts (but not all) of the SDPE (System of Directing and Planning the Economy) adopted in 1976 were harmful to the process of building socialism. Notwithstanding such errors,

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Cuba remains a large scale social experiment in building socialism, and for that alone it should be studied carefully. It has also done a number of important things right over the years: not only the well known successes in health care and education, but also the less frequently discussed dramatic reduction in racial inequality, advances in women's equality, elimination of poverty and dramatic advances in the equality of wealth, involvement of workers in workplace decisions, and so on. Cuba's successes, partial successes, and failures over the years should all be studied carefully. Furthermore, there is a particular aspect to the Cuban experiment that makes it stand out from all other experiments in building socialism: the degree of popular support for the government and its policies.[9] Given that the lack of connection between the leadership and the people was central to the collapse of the experiments in the former USSR and East Bloc, the serious study of Cuba takes on even more importance for anyone interested in the possibilities of socialism. In those studies, strenuous efforts should be made to try to understand Cuba as the Cubans understand it, and not impose prejudices that are prevalent among many on the U.S. left.

NOTES

1. These issues were never "forgotten" or "eliminated to attract foreign capital" as has been charged by some "left critics" of Cuba, but they definitely received reduced attention from 1992-1994. Various members of the political leadership of Cuba have publicly commented on this recently: see for example the March 23, 1996 speech of Raúl Castro at the 5th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.
2. The claim here is only that Smaldone is operating in their tradition in this one regard, his concern with "a sense of ownership" as the key to these Cuban problems. To be very clear and try to avoid misinterpretation, William Smaldone differs greatly from them on many other points. Recall he identified himself as "a leftist" in the opening sentence of the article, something quite different from the politics of Hayek and von Mises.
3. Platform politics in the United States have excluded any discussion on health care from the 1996 elections although the majority of the population continues to think that this is a very important issue. Platform politics in the United States have made sure that there is no discussion of the CIA role in smuggling drugs into the United States during the war against Nicaragua, even while both parties scream about their concern with checking drug

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flows into the United States. In general, platform politics in the United States have not guaranteed that the deepest concerns of the electors are addressed. Beyond that, there is the problem that platform politics have little to do with what is actually done after the elections.

4. There is no implication here that trade unions make policy alone, or even that they are central actors in all social decisions.
5. "The Matter of Democracy in Cuba: Snapshots of Three Moments," in *Transformation and Struggle*, op. cit., p. 42ff.
6. Independent of the comments I made above about the decisions on paint and repair material allocation and the charges of overcentralization, I do think there was something important Cuba could have done during the late 1980s to lessen the problems Smaldone referred to, in line with what they had done about the issue 10 years before. The policies that Bengelsdorf referred to were allowed to peter out by the mid 1980s. At that point, the masses were turned to in an important way for addressing problems with new construction in social projects and housing: the mini brigades were reborn, and the *contigentes* were organized. But nothing comparable was initiated in repair and maintenance of either homes or productive facilities. The claim here is not that the late 80s was a period of inadequate mass participation: to the contrary, the rectification process had increased mass participation as one of its central goals, and I believe it was slowly having success in that direction. Notwithstanding this overall evaluation, I think that involving the masses in repairs and maintenance during this time, even to the extent they were so involved (around housing) in the late 70s and early 80s, was allowed to fall through the cracks.
7. Much more than on the street, in my experience, though democracy certainly is a concern to all Cubans.
8. Not everything the right writes is vacuous, and I believe that as a general policy one should read and consider the views of opponents. The writing by the right on democracy in Cuba is, however, simply vacuous—it is shallow theoretically and almost always filled with factual inaccuracies.
9. An independent, scientific poll was conducted in Cuba in November 1994 (near the height of the economic problems) by the Costa Rican firm CID-Gallup (associated with the Gallup Organization), commissioned by the Miami Herald. The poll found that roughly 69 percent of Cubans considered themselves revolutionaries or socialists or communists, and 58 percent thought the revolution on balance had more achievements than failures. On the other side, only 31 percent thought the revolution had more failures than achievements, and only 24 percent said they were not integrated into the revolution. For a brief resume of some of the very interesting results, see *Cuba Update*, Vol XVI, No 1, Feb 1995.

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POLITICAL CORRECTNESS (AND COURTESY) IN AUSTRALIA

by GARY MACLENNAN

The 1996 election of a conservative coalition government after 13 years of Labor Party rule has brought marked changes in the Australian political climate. The Prime Minister, John Howard, has attacked political correctness (PC) and claimed that his government has lifted the pall of censorship that hung over Australia. Also important in this context has been the election of independent Pauline Hanson, an overt racist, to the Federal Parliament. Standing for a traditional working class Labor seat, Hanson achieved a huge swing. Since her election she has continued to attack Aborigines and Asians. The elections of Howard and Hanson have sparked off discussion about the meaning and role of political correctness as well as a race debate.

I think it is important to begin any discussion of PC with the acknowledgment that when we are discussing PC we are dealing with linguistic behavior and that there have always been rules, laws, conventions, restrictions, and regulations controlling such behavior. I want to stress the word "behavior" here. No one is talking about changing our language. They are simply discussing how we might change our use of it. The

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rules of language behavior are often quite complex and have only ever been partially written down or rendered explicit, but they are very real and very operative. I should also point out that these rules, etc., though they are largely implicit, are historical and as such they are subject to change and challenge.

Now if we move from these general remarks to a specific territory, field, or domain such as that of politics, our first acknowledgment must again be that in the discussion of political matters there have always been rules, etc., governing language use. I want to argue in fact that there are three basic kinds of political correctness: dominant PC(DPC); residual PC (RPC); and emergent PC (EPC). This classification as you will recognize is based on Raymond Williams' notion of dominant, residual and emergent cultures.[1] I intend to say a little about each of these forms of political correctness.

With regard to DPC I had originally been contemplating a reference to treason trials as an example of dominant political correctness in action. However fate in the form of the workers riot in Canberra in August then took a hand. While watching the television coverage of the workers storming parliament I felt a sense of pride and identity with the Irish worker who was urging on the other workers to smash down the gates of parliament. I was also full of joy that the workers had linked up with the Aborigines and students in their attack on Parliament.

Certainly my response to the Canberra demonstration ran very counter to the coverage of the demonstration in the media, especially the public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). There the commentators were trembling in their eagerness to condemn the actions of the workers. On ABC Radio Prue Goward indulged in her very own brand of red baiting, blaming would you believe "Trotskyists" for leading the workers astray.

Now I want to analyze the contrast between my remarks and those of the media commentators. They were articulating what I would characterize as dominant political correctness (DPC). As such they were giving voice to the common sense that constitutes the consensus on which our current set of

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social relations rest. Within the terms of this consensus violence against authority must always be seen to be "counter productive" and "illegitimate." Among the many things that remain undefined and taken for granted here are "authority," "violence," the legitimacy of a government that promised conservatism but is giving us radical right economic policies, and beyond all this the fact that social relations in Australia are marked by relations of exploitation, domination, and the uneven distribution of power and wealth. Above all I would argue that the pious consensus that rushed to condemn the riot in Canberra rests on the acceptance of the current dehumanizing status quo.

There is another aspect of DPC which I wish to deal with briefly. This springs from what Roland Barthes called the ex-nomination (i.e., hiding an entity by hollowing out its name) of the dominant class in our society, namely the capitalist class or the bourgeoisie. As Barthes put it, the bourgeoisie uses the idea of the nation to achieve the situation where it itself is not named and where concepts like "bourgeois," "petit-bourgeois," "capitalism," "proletariat" are the locus of an unceasing haemorrhage: meaning flows out of them until their very name becomes unnecessary.[2] I would add here that we have progressed from it being "unnecessary" to talk of social class to a situation today where it has become close to impossible to get a hearing for a class-based analysis of society. Such is the strength of DPC.

The true home of DPC is of course the financial pages of the mainstream media. There you will find that "the nation" cannot afford wages but is very happy about profits. You will also discover that things like "plagues," "bushfires," "riots," "dangerous criminals" and "wages" all break out, but profits rise.

What then of the other forms of political correctness—residual and emergent? Let us take the residual one first. Again to help us get a grip on this concept Williams' definition of residual cultures proves very useful. He says:

> By "residual" I mean that some experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the

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basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formations.[3]

So residual political correctness would be associated with a social formation or way of life which is no longer dominant. As such it will often have a distinctly oppositional flavor. However, due at least in part to the process of ex-nomination of the dominant elites, the oppositional impulses of the residual culture is often focused not vertically but horizontally. In other words the targets of residual political correctness are not the powerful but generally minority groups.

I would suggest here that the leading proponent of residual political correctness is the Federal member for Oxley, Pauline Hanson, and that the social formation which she and her supporters long for is that of Deakenism. The Deakenite system is named after Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin (1856-1919) who, Bob Leach argues, was one of "the prime exponents and articulators of the internal 'class compromise' or social contract within Australia."[4]

The process of the creation of the Deakenite settlement had three aspects: 1) Imperial/racial; 2) national; and 3) class. First, "imperial and racial" refer to the fact that Australia was positioned within the British Empire where it formed part of the semi-periphery within a constellation of core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral nations. Australia's status as semi-peripheral was due at least in part to its status as a white settler nation. This development Leach explains had its origins in the "British colonial office's mid 19th century dreams of 'New Brittannias'." The periphery of the British Empire consisted of the non-white nations. Australia's privileged position vis a vis the non-white periphery was the material base for what has been widely recognized as its national obsession with race. Second, the Deakenite settlement or social contract operated within national boundaries. It was the state which was responsible for the maintenance of what Leach terms the "boundaries of sentiment" that underpinned the Deakenite social contract. These were: a) Dependency on a Great Power. This was of course Britain in the first instance; b) Institutionalized racism in the form of the "White Australia Policy"; c) Protection in the form of tariffs for local industries; d) The award

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system of 1907 where the state acts as 'umpire' between Labor and Capital.

The third aspect of the Deakenite social contract, class, provided material privileges for the white male worker and because of its dependence upon protectionism, it was vitally dependent upon the Empire's continuity for its maintenance.

But the passing away of the British Empire and with it the old Deakenite certainties has only served to increase the irrational desire for a return to the so-called Golden Age of the 1950s when a poofter was a poofter, an Abo an Abo, a wog a wog, and a sheila a sheila. It is this reactionary nostalgia that Pauline Hanson has profited from. But she is not alone in this. Our good Prime Minister has been eyeing off the racist vote and going as far as he dare to court it. I used the word "dare" because there is a line which has been drawn by the dominant elites in our society. It says you can call aborigines anything you like but don't you dare endanger our Asian trade. Here Tim Hughes notes that "[t]oday Asian countries account for about 60 percent of Australia's exports. Over the past year, they have bought $45 billion worth of goods from us. They have also been a major source of capital for Australian business and major financiers of our current account deficit." (Hughes, *The Courier Mail*, Nov. 2, 1996).

Prime Minister Howard's trouble in this area can be usefully accounted for by Nicos Poulantzas' distinction between hegemonic and reigning fractions of the power bloc.[5] Howard may reign in Canberra, Pauline Hanson may have massive support in her working-class electorate. But both will have their licenses withdrawn if they endanger the interests of the hegemonic bloc, or to put it in terms of the political correctness debate, Hanson and Howard will be forced to end their appeal to RPC if the direct attacks of one and the implicit jibes of the other have a negative impact on our trade relations with Asia.

I would like to emphasize what I feel is a central feature of the residual political correctness. It is intrinsically anti-Asian because its roots are in the British Empire. However Australia now needs Asia. So residual political correctness is of limited use and may even harm the interests of the power-

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ful. Already Hanson's attacks on Asian migrants have sparked off anti-Asian incidents within Australia and may even have begun to hurt our tourist trade. It is this factor that accounts for the recent all party declaration in the federal Parliament against racism. Generally ruling groups and elites like the social division that springs from right populists such as Hanson, but not if it hurts their own economic interests. It remains to be seen if Hanson can drop her obsession with Asians and begin to articulate a politics which does not threaten Australia's economic dependency on Asia.

It is time now to say what I mean by emergent political correctness. This is of course what is normally understood by the term political correctness. Again let us turn to Williams. He says:

> By "emergent" I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created.... But there is then a much earlier attempt to incorporate them, just because they are part—and yet not a defined part—of effective contemporary practice. Indeed it is significant in our own period how very early this attempt is, how alert the dominant culture now is to anything that can be seen as emergent.[6]

What I take from this then is that there is a constant struggle between the dominant and the emergent cultures. Accordingly there is always the potential for tension between dominant political correctness and emergent political correctness. I say potential because it must be recognized that much of the language of the social movements can be incorporated within a liberal agenda which does not threaten the interests of capital.

Emergent political correctness then is the language of those groups who have been, especially since the sixties, endeavoring to achieve in full the promise of citizenship. The groups I am referring to are of course gays, women, blacks, and lately the physically and mentally handicapped and the mentally ill. All these groups have been demanding that they be treated with respect and as part of this they have asked that we change our language behavior so as to recognize their humanity. Nothing more, nothing less, and it is this that I mean by the "courtesy" in the title of this article.

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I want to give here an example from a group I particularly sympathize with—those who suffer from schizophrenia. The recent Sixth Annual Mental Health Services Conference of Australia and New Zealand, which was held in Brisbane, was addressed by Dr. Pat Deegan, who herself suffers from schizophrenia. Rada Rouse gives us this report:

> I do not say, "I am a schizophrenic, I say I am Pat," she told applauding delegates.... Dr. Deegan, from Lawrence, Massachusetts, said people with disabilities were now part of a worldwide movement demanding freedom from discrimination and the stigma of labels.
>
> I think it is reasonable to say "people with mental illness" rather than "the mentally ill, as if we were a herd of cattle," she told AAP.
>
> Like any oppressed group of people—and I believe we are oppressed—we do not like being treated like objects; I think the notion of being politically correct has been distorted, and I say it is important that people in Australia, and in America, strive to be more politically correct.

"We should use people-first language...." Mentalism would become as socially repugnant as sexism or racism, she said. (Rouse, *Living with Schizophrenia Newsletter*, September 13, 1996).

I applaud and endorse what Dr. Deegan has said and I share her hopes but I have to say that since the election of the Coalition Government I am much less hopeful.

I would like now to consider the various tensions that have arisen in this country since the Federal election. I want to analyze what the Prime Minister, John Howard, may have meant when he claimed to have made us all free from political correctness. In this context I will use a recent and I believe a very important article by Nancy Fraser in *New Left Review* (no. 212, 1995). Fraser describes the present situation as one where:

> The struggle for recognition is fast becoming the paradigmatic form of political conflict in the late twentieth century. Demands for "recognition of difference" fuel struggles of groups mobilised under the banners of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality. In these "post-socialist" conflicts, group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilisation. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural

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recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and goal of political struggle. That, of course, is not the whole story. Struggles for recognition occur in a world of exacerbated material inequality....(p.68)

We are dealing here with what I feel would traditionally be characterized as 'glass ceiling issues' or 'movement politics.' For many on the Marxist left it has been a source of puzzlement and frustration that, while capitalism becomes more and more a zero sum game in which the bosses win and the rest of us lose, the politics of recognition has continued to dominate academic expression.

The other side of the coin of course is that many gays, women, etc. who are confronting what they see as their oppression simply cannot make out why the old Marxist 'dinosaurs' want to talk about class conflict. The aim of Fraser's article is to bridge this gap and that is what, I feel, gives it its relevance and importance for us today. She has set for herself nothing less than the task of developing a "critical theory of recognition, one which identifies and defends only those versions of the cultural politics of difference that can be coherently combined with the social politics of equality." (p.69)

She begins by outlining an abstract model which revolves around the axes of Redistribution and Recognition and then assigns to each axis that group which is most clearly interested in this politic. Redistribution can be thought of in terms of providing socioeconomic justice. Fraser leaves unspecified the exact nature of the Redistribution project, but we would think of this in Marxist terms as the abolition of the class structure.

Recognition involves cultural-evaluation and it is of most concern to those who form a despised minority such as gays. There are also groups which have an interest both in Redistribution and Recognition. These Fraser terms "bivalent communities" and the example she gives are of women and ethnic or racial groups. There are two main political remedies employed here, Affirmation or Transformation. Fraser combines these with four political orientations (the Liberal welfare State, Mainstream—Multiculturalism, Socialism, and Deconstruction) in a four-celled matrix.

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	Affirmation	Transformation
Redistribution	liberal welfare state ...supports group differentiation	socialism...blurs group differentiation
Recognition	mainstream multiculturalism ...supports group differentiation	deconstruction ...blurs group differentiation

fig 1 (based on Fraser, 1996: 87)

This gives Fraser two contrasting political strategies: Affirmative Redistribution plus Affirmative Recognition versus Transformative Redistribution plus Transformative Recognition (deconstruction). In her comparison of the merits of these two strategies Fraser argues strongly for Transformative Redistribution plus Transformative Recognition, as this strategy alone addresses the problem of the deep structures of social injustice and discrimination. While the deep structure of the problems remain unaddressed the phenomenon of backlash or misrecognition is a recurring danger. In the case of gender Fraser explains:

> Affirmative redistribution fails to engage the deep level at which the political economy is gendered. Aimed primarily at combating attitudinal discrimination, it does not attack the gendered division of paid and unpaid labour, nor the gendered division of masculine and feminine occupations within paid labour. Leaving intact the deep structures that generate gender disadvantage, it must make surface allocations again and again. The result is not only to underline gender differentiation. It is also to mark women as deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more. In time women can even come to appear privileged, recipients of special treatment and undeserved largesse. Thus an approach aimed at redressing injustices of distribution can end up fueling backlash injustices of recognition. (p.89)

The same processes are at work with the category of race. Again affirmative action and recognition policies fail "to engage the deep level at which the political economy is ritualised." (p.90) As a consequence surface reallocations have to

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be constantly made and the disadvantaged group can even be made to appear privileged.

The instance of the Federal Member for Oxley, Pauline Hanson, and her attacks on Aboriginal Australians is a clear example of this process. Hanson has argued for instance that the fact that Aborigines receive free Hepatitis B vaccine injections is a sign that they are more privileged than white Australians. She did not of course address the question of how it is that Aboriginal Australians are a high risk group for Hepatitis B and many other illnesses.

Fraser's critiques of the limits of the politics of affirmation are I believe very useful. We should add to her account the realization that only a program of Transformative Redistribution and Recognition will address the power of those elites who continually benefit from social and racial divisions in society. I should note here though that Fraser is very aware that the politics of transformative—recognition (deconstruction) are far from non-problematic for oppressed groups in that deconstruction destabilizes all identities. For example, demonstrating the fact of the historical and social construction of the categories 'race' or 'sexual orientation' may appear inconsistent with a new found pride won at no small cost. Oppressed groups may neither want nor be able to take this path.

Finally these remarks bring me back to what I consider are the real problems of political correctness; it is not the existence of residual political correctness nor the groups that cling to this type of language behavior. Rather the real problems in our society are caused I believe by the existence of dominant groups and elites. Our society is characterized above all by relations of power and domination and to argue in such a context that we should simply show each other respect is little short of hypocritical. It is only when we have a society which organizes itself along egalitarian lines that we will achieve the kind of world sought by those who support emergent political correctness.

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NOTES

1. Williams, R. *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 38-42.
2. Barthes, R. *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973), p.138.
3. Williams, *ibid.*, p.40.
4. Leach, R. *The World System and the Social Contract: The Rise and Fall of a Privileged Mode of Production*, Unpublished Thesis, QUT Brisbane,1996.
5. Poulantzas, N. "On Social Classes," [illegible]78, March-April 1973.
6. Williams, *ibid.*, p.41.

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BOOKS

István Mészáros' *Beyond Capital*

by Joel Kovel

István Mészáros, *Beyond Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1995) 994 pp., $25.00.

Beyond Capital,[1] *chef d'oeuvre* of the Hungarian-British philosopher, István Mészáros, may be likened to a great, jagged mountain standing on the border of the twenty-first century. To ascend this peak is quite a challenge. A half-million words, put down in a furious style that might best be called prophetic-dialectical, does not make for an easy time. But the journey is worth the effort. *Beyond Capital,* in its grandeur, comprehensiveness, and fierce energy, stands as the definitive Marxian synthesis for the present moment, the phase of what Mészáros calls capital's *structural crisis.* We live under the deadly spell of "there is no alternative" to the existing system. Mészáros sets out to demolish this myth, and his thesis—that there can and must be an alternative, and that the name of the alternative is socialism—is developed on such a scale and with such power as can do so. To stay with the metaphor a bit longer: standing on the summit of Mészáros' thought, we can see, once more, this promised land.

That the prospects for socialist transformation have never seemed poorer than at the present lends tragic and ironic dimensions to Mészáros' argument without in the least degree weakening its force. The laws of logic have yet to be repealed. If it is true that capital is the active agent in the world's ills as well as being in

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extended structural crisis, then the future depends upon overcoming capital. The discourse of anti-capitalism—Marxism—must be developed to become adequate to this moment; and understanding the transition to what is "beyond capital" becomes the paramount problem before us, no matter how unlikely it may look today. For this project, *Beyond Capital* will stand, irrespective of its stylistic flaws, as the summit of Marxian thought at the close of the twentieth century.

Let me try to offer a thematic synopsis of *Beyond Capital*, then proceed to reflect upon its central message. It goes without saying that much will be left undone here. There are four principal themes to Mészáros' work which are interwoven and elaborated through the text:

1. The nature of capital and its distinction from capitalism;
2. An extended theory of crisis, in which the notion of the structural crisis is argued;
3. An extended critique of post-capitalist societies—the emphasis here is on the shortcomings of so-called "market socialism";
4. A vision of the necessary and sufficient conditions for socialism as the positive transcendence of capitalism.

I. On capital and capitalism

This is the core distinction of the work from which the other ideas follow. It is also the most difficult to grasp. Mészáros' thesis is epitomized in a common mistranslation of the subtitle of Volume I of *Capital*. In the standard edition this reads: "A critical analysis of capitalist production." But what Marx actually wrote and, more to the point, meant was "A critical analysis of the production of capital" (literally, "the production-process of capital"). Hidden in this seemingly minor displacement is a crucial level of abstraction. If we only attend to the manifestation of capital in the given system, we neglect the heart of the matter: the nature of the system itself. Failure to make the distinction between capital and capitalism limits us to rearranging the parameters of the economy while missing the point that capital is, in a phrase repeatedly used by Mészáros, an entire "order of social metabolic reproduction," inherently uncontrollable and destructive. To go "beyond capital" is therefore to undertake a social transformation beyond any particular economic or political measure. As Marx wrote in a passage from *The Poverty of Philosophy* much favored by Mészáros: humans

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must change "from top to bottom the conditions of their industrial and political existence, and consequently *their whole manner of being.*"

But what exactly is capital? Here the reader expecting a ready or neat answer is in for a rough time (made worse by a serious defect in this edition—no doubt a reflection of economic hardship—the lack of a subject index). Scattered throughout the text are innumerable reflections on the nature of capital, yet nowhere are these drawn together into an extended and systematic definition. The closest I could find is buried about two thirds of the way into the volume:

> The essential defining characteristics of all feasible forms of the capital system are: the highest practicable extraction of surplus labour by a separate controlling power, in a labour process conducted on the basis of the hierarchical structural subordination of labour to the material imperatives of production oriented toward accumulation—'value holding fast to itself' (Marx)—and towards the continued enlarged reproduction of accumulated wealth.(668)

Thus when Mészáros writes of capital he means primarily a "system," and also the economic element of the system traditionally known as capital, i.e. self-expanding value. The capital system includes, besides its economic components, the control functions of society, specifically the state. Thus the "inextricable intertwined constituents of capital's organic system . . . are: CAPITAL . . . LABOR . . . STATE." At this lesser level of abstraction capital is defined as "the alienated material conditions of production but also . . . the subjectivity confronting and commanding labour;" while labor, "structurally deprived of control" of production, is "defensively confronting capital"; and the state becomes the "overall political command structure of the antagonistic capital system . . ." (790)

It will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with Mészáros' early work that his conception of capital is grounded in the theory of alienation. As he puts it, "the capital-relation is grounded in the antagonistically alienated objectification of social labour." (619) His outstanding 1970 study of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, *Marx's Theory of Alienation,* established Mészáros as a leading exponent of the "philosophical" or "humanist" school of Marxism. *Beyond Capital* is the culmination of this approach in a comprehensive essay on revolution, grounded in a profound vision of the pathology of capital.

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At the center of the argument is a demonstration of how the alienation of labor extends, through the law of value, onto that macroscopic quality of the system which currently bestrides the world—uncontrollable growth. He puts this most forcefully, buttressing his argument with a crucial passage from the *Grundrisse:*

> capital as such is absolutely incapable of limiting itself, irrespective of the consequences even for the total destruction of humanity. For 'capital is the endless and limitless drive to go beyond its limiting barriers. Every boundary is and has to be a barrier for it. Else it would cease to be capital—money as self reproductive . . .'(172)

What Marx foresaw, and Mészáros now sees more clearly and in greater depth than many Marxists, is the wanton, heedless, cancerous, and nature-destroying proliferation of the capital system. This, beyond all particulars, is at the heart of the present crisis.

II. The structural crisis of capital

A considerable portion of *Beyond Capital* is given over to an assessment of the current state of the capital system. Rich in detail and scathing in polemic (this coming almost as a kind of comic relief from the gravity of the main text), Mészáros cuts a swath through apologetics and mystifications to arrive at his salient point: Capital, at the moment of its greatest triumph, the whole world at its feet and the sense of alternatives more stifled than at any time since Karl Marx first picked up a pen, is nonetheless faced with an intractable structural crisis. Beyond any fluctuation in the business cycle, this predicament is a product of the above mentioned pathological growth. The history of capital until now—including that phase addressed by Marx—was conducted on a stage in which capitalist relations had only penetrated a small part of the world. Now, as it reaches toward its "full expansion into an all-embracing world system," its "structural limits come into play with their devastating intensity." Though "the world of capital still cannot be considered a fully extended and integrated global system, . . . by now it is not far from being that."(485) And so the era of structural crisis is upon us, perhaps ushered in by the extended stagnation of the last quarter-century, but in any case forcing its way onto the world stage.

By continually decreasing its "utilization time," and accelerating the circuits of realization through financial shenanigans and indebtedness, capital staves off the threats of declining profitability.

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But at the same time, the production of waste (including the wastes of militarization), the ravaging of nature, and the jettisoning of "useless" workers and whole nations, all accelerate. The result is a new order of crisis. Mészáros summarizes:

> The historical novelty of today's crisis is manifest under four main aspects: 1. its character is universal rather than restricted to one particular sphere . . .; 2. its scope is truly global rather than confined to a particular set of countries; 3. its time scale is extended, continuous . . . rather than limited and cyclic; 4. its mode of unfolding might be called creeping-in contrast to the more spectacular and dramatic eruptions and collapses of the past.... (680-681)

Thus the "structural crisis affects the totality of a social complex . . ." which "calls into question the very existence of the overall complex concerned, postulating its transcendence and replacement by some alternative complex." The crisis is of no particular part of the totality; rather it is a "systematic blockage of the vital constituent parts," which can decreasingly serve their time-honored function of "displacing contradictions." And so all aspects of the capital system become increasingly dysfunctional and irrational. As Mészáros accurately observes: "Anyone who might feel that this sounds too dramatic should just look around, in whatever direction. Is it possible to find any sphere of activity or any set of human relations not affected by the crisis?" (681-683)

III. The critique of post-capitalism

The crisis can be managed, perhaps indefinitely, but it cannot be resolved. This places post-capitalist possibilities back on the table and mandates the critique of the various alternatives that have gone under the name of socialism. At this point, Mészáros' concept of capital as a more fundamental category than capitalism comes into sharp focus. For if capitalism is no more than one set of strategies for producing capital, then other such sets may exist. And so the question arises as to whether those post-capitalist societies that have arisen during this century are in fact reproductions of capital in another form.

Mészáros' answer to this is forcefully affirmative and spelled out in great detail over hundreds of pages in which the two principal claimants to the name of socialism in this century, the USSR and social democracy, are revealed to have been but two alternative strategies for realizing capital. Much of the argument is developed

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through a detailed treatment of Mészáros' mentor, Gyorgy Lukács, as a peculiarly representative philosopher who sounds the limits of orthodox Marxism. Its essence runs as follows:

The dynamic of capital in alienated labor was preserved in both efforts at post-capitalist development. The Soviet system reproduced capital through bureaucratic and political means of extracting surplus labor; while social democracy was a streamlining of the existing mode of accumulation which failed to deal with the fundamentally antagonistic mode of such accumulation. The former became a monstrosity, the latter a swindle. Both are now on the proverbial scrapheap of history, and one of the most urgent tasks of Marxian thought becomes the dissociation of these failed experiments in socialism from the authentic project itself.

Both Stalinism and social democracy converged toward the possibilities of "market socialism," as a potential alternative path to socialism that preserves "the best of both worlds." Mészáros spares no effort in pummeling this concept. As a specimen of his combative style, we may quote the following:

> In the footsteps of Margaret Thatcher who recited the words of St. Francis of Assisi after her electoral victory, the political masters and propagandists of market socialism also pretended to follow Saint Francis in the role of preaching to the birds. But they did it with a big difference. For whereas one of the most radical saints in history addressed real birds in their natural habitat, they delivered their market socialist sermons to a row of stuffed birds, shouting in excitement: 'How wonderful! It's a great miracle! The killer birds are not going to kill the song birds ever again! They all sit peacefully next to one another! (843)

In a word, market socialism is a euphemism for capitalism.

V. Toward true socialism

Mészáros' vision of socialism can be deduced from his concept of capital. It is the supersession of capital, not the rearrangement of capitalism. And the supersession of capital means, plain and simple, the "supersession of the structural domination of labour." In other words: "an epochal shift," (802) the first time in the history of complex and stratified societies in which humanity will consciously self-regulate its interrelations with nature and those of the social individuals among themselves. Anything less will restore capital's rule.

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There is far too much in Mészáros' account to be dealt with in the frame of this review. However, the following strategic goals may be extracted from his numerous summarizations:

—The means of production are to become "substantive property" of the producers themselves;

—Strict control is to be exercised during the transition over the "personifications of capital."

—An effort must be made to prevent the emergence of new post-capitalist personifications, for example, bureaucracies. (802)

—Although some form of parliamentary renewal is necessary, this has to be combined with an "extra-parliamentary movement as the vital conditioning force of Parliament itself and of the legislative framework of transitional society in general." (729)

—The rule of value is to be overcome through qualitative principles of accountancy. Labor power will no longer be for sale, nor are commodifiable products to be exchanged. Instead, what is to be exchanged are planned and self-managed "productive activities." This is essential to reduce the "decreasing rate of utilization, and it requires "the adoption of a very different mode of living, on the basis of communal production and consumption . . ."(822)

—The entire project requires the "radical democratization of society in every respect," (762)—in "politics no less than in material and cultural production." (728) In short, an uncompromised socialism is necessary. To repeat, we need to change "from top to bottom."

An important element in Mészáros' argument derives from the fact that the roots of the capital system extend back much further than the history of capitalism itself. He makes this point on at least three occasions. Capital, he states, existed in phases of society "when commodity production is not all-pervasive and dominating as it is under capitalism." Capital, in fact, appears "many centuries" before capitalism, even "thousand of years." (912, 938, 980)

Here an inconsistency arises. Recall the definitive statement as to the nature of capital: "The essential defining characteristics of all feasible forms of the capital system are: the highest practicable extraction of surplus labor by a separate controlling power, in a labour process conducted on the basis of the hierarchical structural subordination of labour to the material imperatives of production oriented toward accumulation—'value holding fast to itself' (Marx)—

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and toward the continued enlarged reproduction of accumulated wealth." This, however, is a description of current capitalism, not all feasible forms of capital, since societies of thousands of years ago were not concerned with the extended reproduction of value-derived wealth.

Practically speaking, this is not a serious defect. Since capital is only expressed these days through the capitalist mode of production, for us it can be overcome in no other form. However, Mészáros' inconsistency on this point indicates how elusive the notion of capital, as distinct from capitalism, can be. If we truncate his definition of capital so that it is no longer bound to the capitalist epoch, what remains is the domination of labor itself: "the highest practicable extraction of surplus labor by a separate controlling power, in a labour process conducted on the basis of the hierarchical structural subordination of labour . . ." At this level of abstraction, however, labor can be equated with productive activity in general, so that what Mészáros seems to be saying is that fundamentally capital is equivalent to domination itself as it appears in a given class structure. This is consistent with his notion of socialism, which can be defined as the overcoming of the domination that has become sedimented into the capitalist mode of production. In particular, it would apply to his evocation of "top to bottom" change as well as his imperative that socialism be thoroughly ethical.

Mészáros chides his mentor Lukács for postulating an ethical dimension to socialism without tying this to the practical transformation of the labor process. For Lukács, ethics "operates at a level of abstraction where the actually existing . . . material mediations are of secondary importance . . ." This allowed the great Hungarian philosopher to wishfully ignore the fatal domination of labor that had become built into the Soviet system whose apologist he had become. Mészáros, by contrast, would have ethics concretely related to material politics. For him, "the framework of . . . ethics for the foreseeable future can only be the existing circle of capital's second order mediations . . ." in order to "go beyond capital in all of its actually existing and feasible forms through the redefinition and practically viable articulation of the labour process."(410)

It follows that these "second order mediations" where the actual struggle needs to be waged are of paramount importance.

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Here is a highly compressed listing of capitalism's second order mediations as Mészáros sees them:

—the nuclear family

—alienated means of production

—the mystification of money—which goes back to the worship of the "golden calf at the time of Moses" (this is perhaps what Mészáros means by the "thousands of years" by which capital precedes capitalism)

—fetishistic production objectives

—labor structurally divorced from control over production, in both capitalist and post-capitalist societies

—varieties of capital's state formation, including "self-oriented national states" (i.e., the problem of nationalism to be added to the stew); and finally

—the uncontrollable world market. (108-109)

To which we might add a tremendously important mediation not considered:

—capital's monstrous apparatus of cultural production and propaganda, by means of which consent is secured to its rule.

However the list of second-order mediations is drawn, we have to reckon with the grim reminder Mészáros delivers after presenting his list, that "the disconcerting truth of the matter is that the capital system succeeds in imposing itself on partial emancipatory efforts through the structural interconnections of its constituent parts. Accordingly, what must be confronted and overcome . . . is not only capital's positively self-sustaining force of surplus-labour extraction but also the devastating negative power—the apparently forbidding inertia—of its circular linkages." (109)

Apparently forbidding inertia, indeed! I should think that here appearances are not deceiving. This is forbidding, pure and simple. If capital is rooted in the deepest family attachments, if its grip extends to the virtually transhistorical power of money—if, that is, it is grounded in deep psychological structures no less than in the brutally developed mediations of the market, state and production process as well as culture—and if the persistence of even one of these rhizomes of capital can be enough to regenerate the whole, so that all must be transcended or none, then I should call such a state of affairs forbidding, not to mention demoralizing and depressing.

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Yet reading Mészáros is anything but depressing. Though it is written at the actual nadir of socialism, and depicts a system so monstrous and hell-bent that one can only tremble for the future, one emerges from *Beyond Capital* oddly uplifted. The reason surely does not reside in the objective picture, which, if not hopeless is at least staggering. It lies, rather, in the subjective mood evoked by its author. Let me use a phrase out of favor with modernity: the power of *Beyond Capital* derives from the magnificence of Mészáros' *spirit*, that fierce, Promethean no-saying to capital's dominion, and—there is no better word—the *faith* which suffuses the work and uplifts the spirit of the reader.

Let me put it another way: if everyone had the spirit of István Mészáros, that is, were such a battle for justice so mindful of the totality and the future, so fierce in opposition, so faithful to the exploited and oppressed, and so hopeful for a better world, then such a world would be in closer reach. As bizarre as it may sound, there is nothing stopping socialism but the absence of a socialist spirit. The numbers are there, reason is there, justice is there . . . but the spirit is missing. Of course, more must be said: it is the mediations such as would produce a socialist spirit, a revolutionary subject, if you will, that do not happen, and for definite reasons. These reasons comprise another set of second-order mediations extending subjectively into the domain of class consciousness. A work that propounds to go "beyond capital" needs, therefore, to address those mediations and how they can be directed toward a revolutionary subject. Mészáros, in *Beyond Capital*, exemplifies the spirit of that subject, but he does not treat of it in his text, and this constitutes a gap in his argument.

There are other gaps. If *Beyond Capital* needs to be extended in some respects, it needs to be made more immediate and concrete in others. Mészáros is ample in his denunciation of false starts along the socialist road. The logic is impeccable; but it is too one-sided as well and hence undialectical. The horizon of *Beyond Capital* seems completely occupied by Stalinism and the British Labour Party, as if nobody else ever did anything that was at least prefiguratively socialist. One should be critical of transitional and intermediate social movements like radical democracy, or various efforts to build a cooperative, communal society in the interstices of capitalism. But to be critical is not to dismiss out of hand; it is to determine, rather, the dialectical strands unfolding in a given

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phenomenon. "Ruthless criticism" was Marx's watchword, and it should be ours as well. This was to be taken, however, as a criticism of one's own views as well as that of the established system, not, presumably, to reject those views but to discern in them what is genuine and what is false. It is important to bear in mind that in the transition period to socialism certain elements of the existing society, including aspects of the market, have to persist, however they may be subordinated. It follows that a study of the transition to socialism cannot reject out of hand everything being done in the present, but must find—and ruthlessly criticize, in the sense just noted—those bridges that can be built and seeds that can be grown. To reject out of hand all transitional forms is to provide an abstract and ultimately utopian vision of socialism.

Ultimately, however, it is not István Mészáros who needs to say more and fill in the blanks, but the rest of us. To have written *Beyond Capital* is to have done one's duty towards the future. Mészáros approvingly quotes Marx's final statement in *Critique of the Gotha Program*: *Dixi et salvavi animam meam*: "I have spoken and saved my soul." I would think he had the same words in mind for himself. Surely he is entitled to them.

NOTES

1. I have removed many of the italicizations freely employed by the author in quoted material, in the interests of clarity.

There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.

—Karl Marx

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The People's Church

by Paul Surlis

Gary MacEoin, *The People's Church: Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Mexico: and Why He Matters* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company 1996) 174 pp., $16.95.

Gary MacEoin is a theologian, lawyer, political scientist, and author of more than twenty books on the Church's social teaching, liberation theology, and other contemporary religious and social issues. MacEoin knows the Latin American scene and particularly Mexico, intimately as the present volume shows. He is also a keen student of the Vatican and the intrigues and collisions with power it engages in as it pursues what it perceives as the long-term interests of the church in Rome, even at the expense of the local church and local bishops, especially those committed to liberation theology and the well-being of the poor and marginalized. Thus, anomalously, the Vatican while preaching social justice and the upholding of human rights at times enters into alliances with those, in this case Mexican power holders, who perpetrate torture, repression, violence, and death to the poorest and most vulnerable for whom the Gospels enjoins a preferential option.

Anyone who thinks this is an exaggerated account should read MacEoin's book in which all this and more is recounted and documented in a narrative that takes us back to Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, and the origins in pastoral practice of what has been called liberation theology in the gestation of which

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a whole generation of Latin American theologians and some bishops were involved prior to its emergence at Medellin in 1968, and in the writings of Gustavo Gutierrez, since 1971. (Gutierrez was heavily involved in writing the documents of the Medellin conference of the Latin American Bishops in 1968 as they engaged in applying the teachings of the Second Vatican Council to their continent).

Samuel Ruiz was appointed bishop of San Cristobal de Las Casas in 1960 by John XXIII. The diocese is named for the sixteenth century Las Casas who defended the indigenous peoples against Spanish oppressors and who is now hailed as the first champion and liberator of the native peoples. Ruiz has proven to be a worthy successor. In his early visitations of the diocese Ruiz stayed in the homes of the wealthy but as he saw the impoverished conditions of the poor he decided to accept the hospitality they offered; in doing so he signaled his taking the side of the socially marginalized and despised peasants. The wealthy and powerful, sensing what was happening, began to resent Ruiz, but there was more to come.

Ruiz at first engaged in traditional catechesis of the natives, teaching the catechism and prayers to be memorized. Missionaries helped and rural cooperatives and health clinics began to be provided. Gradually under the influence of Vatican II and under prodding from the indigenous who wanted more attention to their bodies and not just their souls, Ruiz and his teams developed Gospel proclamation that was transformative for society and persons in it. It also involved the living of a new life where poverty, hunger, and disease were targeted for condemnation and removal. The liberative pastoral practice recognized the validity and beauty of the people's languages and culture, and than the people themselves were empowered to become, or struggle to become, subjects of their own historical destinies.

In 1978 Archbishop Prigione was appointed apostolic delegate to Mexico and his main mission became the cultivation of good relations with the wealthy and powerful and the restoration of state recognition of the church, something denied since the Revolution of 1910. The mission also involved curbing liberation theology (part of Vatican policy anyway) and silencing Ruiz's ever-sharper criticism of the Mexican government for its injustices to the poor, its corruption, and possible involvement in the drug trade (with all the attendant horrors and murders that brought in its wake—in-

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cluding possibly the assassination of Cardinal Posadas at Guadalajara Airport in 1993).

MacEoin tells that Ruiz was about to be replaced or neutralized with a powerful coadjutor when the Zapatista uprising of 1994 necessitated his retention as bishop and as the only person the Zapatistas would accept as mediator with the Mexican government. As will be recalled the, Zapatistas opposed the just-signed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which they saw as the death knell for indigenous people because of its economic policies of privatization and destruction of their land holdings, among other things. MacEoin speaks of administrative genocide that would deprive the people of their culture and the material bases for their very existence. The Zapatistas made it clear that they were not seeking to take over the government or the state but they were looking for justice, especially for a fair share of the wealth they were producing for the rest of Mexico and for export. Bishop Ruiz never endorsed any form of violence or armed insurrection, but the Zapatistas may still be seen as an outgrowth of the type of civil society his pastoral practice had created and its reaction in face of continued exploitation and injustice. This struggle is not yet over. Bishop Ruiz has his coadjutor who, in recognition of the Mexican government's removal of restrictions on the church, is right-wing and socially conservative; capitalism, state power, and the Vatican in collusion are tough opponents. But Bishop Ruiz and the people whom he inspired and empowered are still there as witnesses, to the power of the Gospel and the meaning of the integral liberation which it inspires.

This is an excellent book. It deserves the widest possible readership, especially among bishops, pastoral workers, teachers, catechists, and theologians. Hopefully politicians and labor leaders will read it also at this time when global economic policies are creating small cadres of the mega-rich and ever-increasing numbers of impoverished and destitute children, women, and men.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Response to Martin Glaberman

by Nelson Lichtenstein

Martin Glaberman's political outlook stands in the long shadow cast by C.L.R. James and George Rawick, but his review (November 1996) of my recent biography of Walter Reuther does this scholarly tradition no credit. Glaberman buries a useful critique of my work beneath an assault so careless and confusing as to make one wonder if he understands the historical method, or perhaps more charitably, if he actually took the time to sit down and read the book. As a consequence, Glaberman often attacks me for agreeing with him, while ignoring those sections of the biography at which real political differences arise.

The ahistorical quality of Glaberman's review becomes embarrassingly obvious in paragraph number two. Glaberman asserts that the title of my book, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit,* is "pure fiction"; and he uses as justification a 1970 editorial/obituary in the reactionary *Detroit News* which asserted that in the wake of Reuther's untimely death, the UAW might not find a new president as effective as he in "disciplining rank and file auto workers."

Does a quarter century of political and economic conflict and accommodation mean nothing? In 1945, at the height of the UAW's long postwar strike against General Motors, auto publicist George Romney called Reuther "the most dangerous man in Detroit because no one is more skillful in bringing about the revolution without seeming to disturb the existing forms of society." Romney's fear of Reuther was well grounded because the GM strike program, whose success would have advanced union power by making corporate price, investment and shop seniority policies subject to much greater labor influence, represented a set of politics that

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C.L.R. James and other Glaberman comrades of that era heartily endorsed. The failure of that 1945 Reuther gambit and its consequences, which include the disastrous negation of much that was progressive in his early union leadership, constitutes the heart of my book. Glaberman seems willfully oblivious to this process of historical transformation. He seeks to avoid such an analysis in favor of a monochromatic indictment.

Indeed, Glaberman reads my book like an antiquarian, rather than a dialectical historian. For example, he seems quite upset that I do not accept as definitive his assertion that Walter Reuther was a member of the Communist Party in 1936, based upon a manuscript comment penned sixteen years after-the-fact by the UAW Communist, Nat Ganley. Well, this is what historians do: they look at all the evidence, weigh it intelligently and reach the best conclusion they can. From a political perspective, my assessment ends up not very different from that of Martin Glaberman: Walter Reuther's policies and politics in 1936 and 1937 were virtually indistinguishable from that of the CP auto faction. He attended the meetings they sponsored and cooperated intimately with the Party's leading figures. But after reading the FBI reports, interviewing old comrades and probing the correspondence, the best I can come up with is the qualified phrase: "according to several well-placed observers, he may actually have paid the party monthly dues."

Glaberman's hostility is such that I am "defensive" about Reuther's "one party government" in the postwar UAW; but even a casual glance at any chapter in the post 1948 section of the book will demonstrate the extent to which I indict the "Reuther caucus" as "a machine for the preservation of the status quo within the UAW." Glaberman and I even cite the same incident—Reuther's censorship of opposition newspapers—and quote the same critic—Frank Marquart—on what I call the "bureaucratic encrustation" of the union. Likewise, Glaberman thinks I am a defender of what Harvard economist Sumner Slichter called "workplace jurisprudence." But in chapter seven, I make clear that this Reutherite project was a failure, for "the underlying problem lay in the very nature of an orderly system of industrial jurisprudence, for the orderliness so imposed shifted the balance of class power into management's hands." And Glaberman seems to think that I did not devote a huge amount of research to a detailed explication of

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UAW institutional racism and Walter Reuther's failure to do very much about it. But it is all there, in chapter seventeen.

Glaberman's sloppy reading of my book stands in the way of a real analysis of the important political issues that divide us. For many years, Martin Glaberman has championed shop-floor militancy and union democracy—both in his reconstruction of the historical record and in his reading of the issues which divide contemporary industrial relations. This work has been an inspiration to many of us, but in my biography of Walter Reuther, I argue that shop militancy alone is insufficient to defeat the power of multinationals like General Motors. Industry-wide organization, independent political action, and yes, union leadership, are essential to the assertion of labor's power. Such structures require organizational discipline. Glaberman takes this argument and turns it into an accusation that I hold the rank and file in "contempt." But the real issue before us is rather the extent to which militant, democratic trade unionism was possible under the legal, political and economic conditions existing in mid-century America. Was Reuther's devolution as a trade union leader organizationally inevitable or the product of his distinctive politics or opportunism? I think the answer a mixed one, which is why I take more than five hundred pages to tell the tale.

Reply to Nelson Lichtenstein

by Martin Glaberman

Nelson Lichtenstein is unhappy with my review of his book. But his defense does not improve matters. He objects to my criticism of his use of the quote from George Romney, "the most dangerous man in Detroit." I have no problem with his quoting Romney. But the use to which he put the quote does involve

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problems. Problem 1: He wants us to believe Romney's statement, which wasn't true of Reuther's career and which was intended as a propaganda ploy to deceive and manipulate the public. Problem 2: he does not counter this statement (a view which Romney did not repeat when he became an auto executive at American Motors instead of a paid propagandist) with statements by the *Detroit News*, Chrysler vice-chairman Virgil Boyd, and others which tended to portray Reuther as necessary to maintaining discipline and order in the auto industry. Problem 3: he takes this one-sided and unsupported quote, which might be unobjectionable buried somewhere in the book and makes it the title. A reasonable reader might conclude that Lichtenstein intends this book to be a political defense of Reuther, not a balanced portrait. He calls my review ahistorical, but it is he who violates elementary rules of objective historical writing.

Lichtenstein claims that I attack him for agreeing with me. Not quite. As I noted in my review, the book documents Reuther's career, "warts and all." Without the warts the book would have no credibility at all. But the warts are always explained, or justified, or excused. He documents Reuther's personal racism. But he refused to use any of the substantial documentation of the institutional racism of the Reuther regime that was made available to him. It is not all there in Chapter Seventeen. He documents Reuther's bureaucratization of the UAW but then throws in the gratuitous remark that Reuther "could never rule by fiat alone." He documents Reuther's total support of the hawks in the Vietnam war but then invents Reuther's "dovish instincts." He concludes that "No matter how farsighted the men and women of Reuther's generation, their capacity to thwart American racism [!], limit the impact of the world market, and fight the corporations was always constrained by time and circumstance." (443) He documented the restraints on militancy but apparently doesn't think that that limited the union's ability to fight the corporations. Beginning with the title and ending with the Epilogue, despite the warts, Lichtenstein presents Reuther as a model for the contemporary labor movements, ignoring the fact that he was an architect of that movement.

Lichtenstein objects to my charging him with contempt for rank and file workers and with the rejection of militancy. He says that "shop militancy alone is insufficient to defeat the power of

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multi-nationals like General Motors. Industry-wide organization, independent political action, and yes, union leadership are essential to the assertion of labor's power. Such structures require organizational discipline." But he ignores his own documentation of the fact that "organizational discipline" involved clamping down on militancy. He wants to have his cake and eat it—to attack the "parochialism" of shop floor militancy but to support "militancy" organized and controlled from above.

He charges me with being upset that he doesn't accept my assertion that Reuther was a member of the Communist Party in 1936. I am not upset—disappointed, maybe, but not upset. He says, "this is what historians do: they look at all the evidence, weight it intelligently, and reach the best conclusion they can." That is only part of what historians do. They also take responsibility for their conclusions and accept that they are subject to discussion and debate.

Lichtenstein concludes his letter with a question. "Was Reuther's devolution as a trade union leader organizationally inevitable or the product of his distinctive politics and opportunism? I think the answer is a mixed one..." Strangely enough, I agree. The fact that the UAW wasn't the only union to become authoritarian and to decline indicates objective factors at work that were beyond the control of the participants. In addition, Reuther was not the only labor leader with class-collaborationist politics and opportunism. But this should be taken as an indication that Reuther cannot be taken seriously as a model for the contemporary labor movement and not as a justification for his devolution.

I come out of a radical tradition in which intense debate was not taken personally or allowed to damage comradeship or friendship. If Lichtenstein thinks I was too polemical, I apologize. But I can't see this book as simply an academic exercise. There are thousands of auto workers who are suffering speed-up and unemployment because of Reuther's legacy—a bureaucratized union run by hacks.

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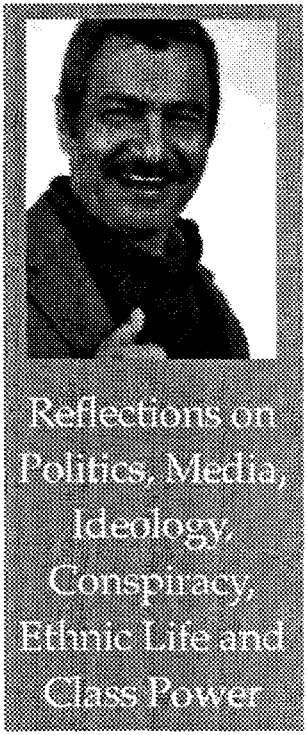

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(Continued from inside front cover)

As of March 1, 1997, Ellen Meiksins Wood will become a third editor of *Monthly Review*. She has been working with us as a member of an informal editorial committee for some three years now, and during that time, as many of you know, she has taken a major part of the responsibility for planning and publishing two of our special summer issues ("In Defense of History," 1995, and "Capitalism in the Age of Information," 1996), and she is doing the same for next summer's issue which will be on the prospects of labor in the present phase of capitalism.

In age Ellen is approximately a generation younger than we are, and this gives us confidence that essential continuity will be assured at *MR* until well into the next century and millennium.

In the meantime, if you want to know where Ellen stands as a Marxist scholar and journalist, you can do no better than to recall what she wrote in *MR* three years ago (E.P. Thompson: Historian and Socialist," January 1994). We quote:

> The critique of capitalism is out of fashion—and here there is a curious convergence, a kind of unholy alliance, between capitalist triumphalism and socialist pessimism. The triumph of the right is mirrored on the left by a sharp contraction of socialist aspirations. Left intellectuals, if they are not actually embracing capitalism as the best of all possible worlds, have little hope for anything more than a bit more space within the interstices of capitalism; and they look forward, at best, to only the most local and particular resistances. And there is another curious effect of all this. Capitalism is becoming so universal, so much taken for granted, that it is becoming invisible.
>
> Now clearly we have plenty to be pessimistic about. Recent and current events have given us plenty of cause. But there is something curious about the way many of us are reacting. If capitalism has indeed triumphed, you might think that what we need now more than ever is a *critique* of capitalism. Why is this the right moment to embrace modes of thought which seem to deny the very possibility not only of surpassing capitalism but even of critically understanding it? How are we supposed to gain access to a critical knowledge of capitalism if we start with modes of thought which see only contingency, fragmentation, difference and are generally hostile to any notion of capitalism as a systemic unity, any notion of a systemic logic, or even any notion of causality?
>
> I really do think we are in an unprecedented situation now, something we have not seen in the whole history of capitalism. What we are experiencing is not just a deficit of *action*, or the absence of the necessary instrumentalities and organization of struggle (though those are certainly thin on the ground). It is not only that we do not know how to *act* against capitalism but that we are forgetting even how to *think* against it.

Ellen Meiksins Wood's works include:

—*The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism* (London: Verso, 1986)

—*The Pristine Culture of Capitalism: A Historical Essay on Old Regimes and Modern States* (London: Verso, 1992)

—*Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)

—with Neal Wood, *A Trumpet of Sedition: Political Theory and the Rise of Capitalism, 1509-1688* (London: Pluto Press; New York: New York University Press, forthcoming, 1997).

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